

BEAUTY AND BANDS

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CONCERNING ISABEL CARNABY

A DOUBLE THREAD

THE FARRINGDONS

FUEL OF FIRE

PLACE AND POWER

IN SUBJECTION

MISS FALLOWFIELD'S FORTUNE

THE WISDOM OF FOLLY

HER LADYSHIP'S CONSCIENCE

TEN DEGREES BACKWARD

CUPID'S GARDEN

SIRIUS, AND OTHER STORIES

VERSES WISE OR OTHERWISE

LOVE'S ARGUMENT, AND OTHER POEMS

(And in collaboration with her husband)

KATE OF KATE HALL

BEAUTY AND BANDS

BY

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER

(THE HON. MRS. ALFRED FELKIN)

'I took unto me two staves: the
one I called Beauty, and the other
I called Bands.'

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BOOK I

BEAUTY



CHAPTER I

VIOLA CHALFONT

‘My dear Viola,’ exclaimed Colonel Chalfont with considerable irritation, ‘I wish I could induce you to consider your future.’

‘My dearly-beloved parent, I am always considering it. What else is there for me to consider? My past is too short for much consideration. I don’t think that even Lot’s wife herself would have looked back if she ’d only had twenty years to look back upon!’

‘That is mere quibbling. I want to know what will become of you when I am dead.’

Miss Chalfont suppressed an unfilial giggle: ‘I should have thought the more important question was what will become of you!’

‘That remark is both irreverent and undutiful,’ replied the irate Colonel, ‘if not positively blasphemous. But I cannot waste my time in correcting your manners.’

‘No need,’ responded Viola sweetly: ‘they are universally considered most attractive.’

‘You know, Viola,’ continued her father, ‘that I am not as young as I used to be.’

‘Still, when it comes to that, who is?’

Colonel Chalfont ignored this interruption. ‘And I am by no means a rich man. Your fortune will be very small.’

‘Well, considering that my face is my fortune I am glad that it is small. I can’t bear people with large faces.’

‘Therefore you must see that it is of the utmost importance that you should marry, and marry well.’

Miss Chalfont laughed with charming impertinence : ‘Then in that case my small fortune will prove most useful ; for a girl with a face like mine could marry anybody—literally anybody.’

‘Really, Viola, your egregious vanity positively shocks me.’

‘It needn’t. It isn’t really at all egregious : it is merely an acceptance of an obvious truth. It’s no more vain of me to say that I am good-looking than of you to say that you are not as young as you were. Both are facts patent to the naked eye.’

‘Beauty doesn’t last for ever,’ growled the Colonel.

‘According to Keats it does, and can never “pass into nothingness.” But still—without going as far as Keats—it lasts long enough for a really pretty girl to look round and take her pick, without jumping at the first man who looks her way, as the plain ones have to do, and thank Heaven fasting on their knees for that.’

‘You haven’t jumped : you are twenty and still single !’

Viola shrugged her pretty shoulders. ‘Pooh ! What’s twenty ? Beauty may not be, in spite of Keats, a joy for ever, but at any rate it’s a joy for considerably over twenty years.’

‘Your poor mother was married at eighteen.’

‘I know she was. But think how much better she might have done if she had waited till she was twenty ! She might have married a man who was a rich man, and who was quite as young as he used to be.’

Colonel Chalfont laughed gruffly. His daughter never failed to amuse him when she was in one of her impudent moods. Still he kept to his point. ‘Surely you have collected scalps enough to satisfy even your

vanity. You have been refusing offers ever since you were sixteen.'

'Well, what a nice, inexpensive amusement! Think of what it might have cost you in breaches of promise if I had accepted them all! If I wasn't such a perfect little gentleman I should now make a coarse joke about the difficulty of getting out of such breeches when you had once got into them: but my exquisite manners—which, by the way, you don't seem able to appreciate—forbid so vulgar a play upon words. Yes; I've got as fine a collection of scalps as any young woman I know: enough, if cured, to make a full-sized carriage-rug: and yet I've never cost you a penny more than my board and clothes. You really are a very fortunate old gentleman, though you don't seem to realise it!'

Her father tried to be patient. 'Having had your fling, don't you think, my dear girl, that you might settle down and begin accepting offers instead of refusing them, for a change?'

Viola shook her lovely head. 'Not too many: otherwise you'll have to pay for all those breaches of promise again which you didn't have to pay for before. Which sounds Irish, but really is only plain English.'

'All right then: one acceptance will be enough. What do you say to Kinfell?'

Viola clapped her hands in glee. 'Ah! now we come to King Charles's head: I thought it would thrust itself into the conversation sooner or later. What do I say to Lord Kinfell? Why, I keep on saying *No* over and over again, but he doesn't seem to understand me. I suppose that being half Scottish he doesn't know that *No* is the English for *No*.'

'Kinfell is a very good fellow,' urged the anxious father.

'I never said he wasn't. I only said he didn't

know the English for *No*—quite a different thing. You are a very good fellow, but you don't know the Chinese for *No*, or the Spanish or the Japanese.'

'Why not say Yes to him for a change?'

'He mightn't know the English for that, either.'

'I think he would, my dear.' And the Colonel's deep-set eyes twinkled. 'But, speaking seriously, I do wish that you could see your way to accept Kinfell. It would be a most advantageous settling for you, and he would make an excellent husband.'

Viola pouted. 'And a very dull one.'

'What does that matter? Women don't want mountebanks for husbands: when they marry, they want something more than being amused. You don't suppose your poor mother married me just to be amused, do you?'

'Heaven forbid! If she did, the reality must have been an awful disappointment! But even you, dearest, at your age aren't as dull as Lord Kinfell: and I dare say you had occasionally quite bright moments when you were as young as you used to be. Even now you have flashes of intelligence at times.'

The Colonel sighed deeply. What had he done, he asked himself, that he should be burdened with the heavy responsibility of a beautiful and motherless daughter? And there was no doubt that Viola was beautiful—exceptionally and distractingly beautiful. Her hair, the colour of burnished copper, fell in charming waves and curls all over her small head; her eyes, of a greenish colour with a pattern of a deeper shade upon them, making them look like a pair of large moss-agates, were astonishingly handsome, set off as they were by pencilled brows and long lashes considerably darker than her hair; and her small straight nose and scarlet mouth were formed according to the strictest standards of physical perfection: but perhaps her greatest beauty was her

dazzling complexion, which could put even roses and lilies to shame by the delicacy of its texture and the loveliness of its colouring. Miss Chalfont was certainly a beauty : nobody—least of all herself—could entertain any doubts on that score. Her only blemish in her own eyes—though by no means in the eyes of her numerous admirers—was that her figure partook rather of the nature of the goddess than of the sylph. She was fairly tall and finely proportioned, and her fully developed figure was one to delight an artist's eye : but she lived in the days when it was the object of any right-minded young woman to resemble a maypole or a scarecrow as nearly as possible ; and Viola's graceful curves and rounded outlines strayed very far indeed from these accepted ideals. She was a modern Hebe—an embodiment of youth and health ; and although her beauty was too pronounced to be ever mistaken for anything but beauty, it was not the kind of beauty which was most fashionable in her decadent day. And this fact was the source of much sorrow on the part of the headstrong and arrogant young lady. In fact it was the only fly in her otherwise delicious pot of ointment.

Her mother had died when she was too young to realise or even feel her loss : Viola could only remember her as a dim and distant dream. For in the short period during which Mrs. Chalfont and her daughter inhabited this terrestrial globe together, the former was too much of an invalid to take much notice of her only child. Thus it came to pass that Viola was brought up—if one could dignify the haphazard process by such a term as 'up-bringing'—by her happy-go-lucky father : and as she always had her own way in everything she was inclined to pity rather than envy those of her contemporaries who were hampered in their royal progress by the restrictions of a female parent. At least that is how Viola regarded

her irreparable loss, if she ever thought about the matter at all.

She was naturally a kind-hearted girl with an inexhaustible flow of high spirits and good humour : but, as was inevitable, she grew up vain and frivolous and selfish. How could a girl be otherwise with no restraining hand to guide her, and endowed with the fatal gift of beauty to boot ? Charlie Chalfont was unsurpassed as a boon companion or rider to hounds : but he was the last man in the world successfully to bring up a motherless daughter. He was a very handsome man and had charming manners when he liked : but of what avail are looks and manners in the bringing up of the young ? They in nowise fit a man for this herculean task.

Charlie Chalfont had never had much money : and what he had had he had spent : wherefore he was correct in his statement that if an unmarried daughter survived him and his pension, that daughter would be very inadequately provided for. But then, as he argued in his own mind, no daughter of his and Julia's could fail to be good-looking : and what excuse was there for a good-looking girl to remain unmarried ? That was the case in a nutshell : so what need was there to trouble his quondam curly, and now bald, head further about it.

Viola was certainly handsome enough to do justice even to such physically attractive parentage as Colonel (he was then Major) and Mrs. Chalfont provided : in this respect she had fulfilled the most exacting expectations. But with regard to the marriage part of the affair she had proved less satisfactory. She had already received offers of marriage galore : but so far she had turned up her pretty little nose at every one of them : and she was not twenty, whilst her father was an easy sixty.

It was now two-and-twenty years since Major

Chalfont had lost his heart (an organ which had already seen a good deal of active service) to the beautiful Miss Julia Windybank at a Silverhampton Bachelors' Ball. She was the belle of the ball, and more than twenty years his junior : so that there was every excuse for (as he would have been described in those days) 'the gallant Major.' But an excuse is not necessarily a justification : and a marriage between an impecunious and extravagant officer and a country doctor's daughter with no fortune save her face, is not altogether a wise arrangement from a purely worldly point of view. The unwisdom of this union was speedily realised by both Major and Mrs. Chalfont; but the realisation of its folly in no way lessened the immutability of the bond. The lovely Julia found that she had made a mistake which could not be remedied in this world ; so she lost very little time in rectifying it in another. After five years of wifehood and three of motherhood she retired from a sphere of existence which had given her so much less than she considered she had every right—on account of her undeniable beauty—to expect, leaving her impecunious and extravagant husband to bring up their only child as best he could : she herself having done her part by bequeathing to that child a beauty even more exceptional than her own. Major Chalfont did his best to bring up his daughter properly, but his best did not amount to much when it came to the bringing up of children : so that Viola had her own way in everything with such results as might reasonably have been expected.

It was a pity that the bereaved husband—having no near relations of his own—did not allow his late wife's mother and sister to thrust their feminine fingers into the pie of Viola's education : but Major Chalfont considered himself vastly the social superior of his wife's people (as indeed he was) ; so partly be-

cause he had nothing in common with them, and partly because he was not entirely devoid of that unconscious snobbishness which is latent (and not always merely latent) in every one of us, he and the Windybanks drifted apart, and Viola saw nothing of her mother's relations after she was eight or ten years old. As a matter of fact she had no wish to see them, as she considered them strict—which they were in comparison with her father : so she early washed her hands of all feminine authority, and found herself much freer without it. She had her due share of daily governesses and then of boarding-schools : but as all the younger teachers fell in love with her father's good looks, and all the older ones with her own, Viola's education was a sort of Juggernaut procession over the forms of adoring female teachers. When her (so-called) education was finished, the Juggernaut procession still continued ; but it changed its course, and passed over the bodies of the adoring subalterns in her father's regiment. Then the Colonel retired on his pension and settled down at Eldhurst ; but Eldhurst was only four miles from Woolwich, so there were still plenty of subalterns within call for the making of the Juggernaut pavement ; and they—dear, obliging young men !—were only too ready to walk or ride or bicycle over to Eldhurst every day to be sacrificed in so excellent a cause.

Thus it came about that by the time she was twenty, Miss Chalfont was as thoroughly spoilt and selfish a young woman as one would meet with in a whole summer's day.

The house to which Colonel Chalfont had retired was called Eldhurst House, and was one of the oldest and most imposing houses in that old-world village. It was built of beautiful rose-coloured Tudor bricks, with creamy stone facings, and was panelled throughout with oak : it had one of the most beautiful stair-

cases in England, and one of the best authenticated ghosts. Its imposing front looked on to the village High Street, with a somewhat aristocratic and condescending air: and its equally beautiful but less awe-inspiring back looked upon an old garden of velvet lawns and glossy mulberry trees, with an orangery at the far end, which was now used as a summer-house, and which formed an admirable setting for the Juggernaut procession, being so large that it would accommodate at least twenty young officers at tea at the same time. Between the lawn close to the house and the larger garden beyond, there stood a very fine pair of wrought-iron gates which were reputed to be the work of Vandyke who lived at that house (so tradition asserted) at such times as the Court was at Eldhurst Palace. Be that as it may, there was a 'V' introduced into the intricate pattern of the iron tracery, which—so the young officers persisted—did not stand for Vandyke at all but for Viola: and so it did, as far as they were concerned, even if archaeologists thought differently. But wisdom dwells with youth quite as often as with archaeology: and joy much oftener.

In the brief intervals between her numerous flirtations (which intervals it must be admitted were few and far between) Viola loved to cross the High Street and go through the courtyard and across the moat to the great banqueting-hall, which is all that is left of that royal palace where the Kings of England spent their Christmases for so many centuries, and where the lovely Countess of Salisbury lost that garter which has made her famous unto this day. Viola possessed the historic sense had she only cultivated it, and she was quick to feel the mental atmosphere of any place in which she found herself. She was one of those by no means rare natures who love places more than they love people; a cat-like quality which is possessed by

many not otherwise cat-like women. To her a beautiful building or landscape would always appeal more than a beautiful face. Nevertheless it rather thrilled her to stand on the old bridge which was built by Edward IV. over the moat in place of the still older drawbridge, and to imagine the knights and ladies who had walked and ridden over those lovely arches since these latter first spanned the water. Viola would have liked to live in the days of chivalry : she would have liked to be the Queen of Beauty at the tournaments which were held in the tilting-yard just beyond the moat ; and as she looked at the beautiful gateway which still guards the entrance to the tilting-yard, she used to picture the knights riding under it to pay homage to the fairness of her face. But though those particular knights ' were dust, and their swords were rust, and their souls were with the saints, we trust,' there were still others to take their place, and to do homage to the same thing in a different way. Other times might bring other manners, but Beauty still held her own : her reign never came to an end. The Queen is dead. Long live the Queen ! Thus ever runs the proclamation of the Queen of Beauty.

And though other royal houses have had their day and passed away and been wiped off the face of the earth, the dynasty of the beauties has never come to an end. One after another has swayed the sceptre and handed it on to her successor, and still the royal house stands fast and holds its own. Other forms of government serve their special purpose and then are succeeded by something else : but the rule of Beauty is as secure to-day as it was in the time of Helen of Troy, or Cleopatra.

And Viola Chalfont was of this reigning dynasty, and knew it. Her untutored sense of history made her half-unconsciously feel herself to be one with the bygone beauties of a far-off age. They were of her

race, those women who had sat within the pavilions in the old tilting-yard, and had heard the lances clash and seen the knights fall in proof of the supremacy of their beauty : and she knew exactly how they had felt when they were proclaimed Queens of the tournaments, because she, too, had—according to her day and generation—felt the same. But she loved the picturesque old place for its own sake, quite as much as for the sake of its traditions and associations.

It was a surprise to a good many of her friends, including her father, that Viola was not already married. But she herself thought differently. She belonged to a type that does not easily fall in love, and to an age that has ceased to regard marriage as a feminine necessity. She was—as she would have put it—having the time of her life, and she saw no point in curtailing this time for the sake of some young man or other to whom she was utterly indifferent. A husband might possibly have been quite as uninteresting and probably not nearly so indulgent as her father : so why burden herself with one ? She had the sense to know that she was handsome enough to marry at any age, unlike plainer girls who did well to make what hay they could in such cloudy sunshine as was accorded to them : therefore what need was there for hurry ? She did not realise that though she was young enough for anything, her father was already too old for most things : and that the remnant of parental responsibility which still lingered in his light and mercurial heart was stirring him to find a home and a guardian for the lovely child whom he knew he must ere long leave penniless.

Of all the crowd of lovers who had laid themselves down under the wheels of Viola's triumphal chariot, none was so acceptable to Colonel Chalfont as Lord Kinfell, a young Artillery officer then stationed at Woolwich. This golden youth was everything most

desirable in a son-in-law—rich, titled, and of unimpeachable character ; and if he appeared less ideal from Viola's standpoint than from her father's, it was only because the superficial gifts of beauty and brilliance had been denied him. Hugh Kinfell was sterling—one might almost have said stolid—in his excellence ; and although a brave and efficient officer, and very popular with his men, he was not what north-country people call ' quick at the uptake ' at the best of times—least of all when he was hopelessly in love. There was a certain amount of Scottish blood in his veins, which, so to speak, rose to the surface when humour was in the air. This excellent young man's attitude towards a joke was similar to that of a dog's towards a bone : he looked at it from a distance, then sniffed it all round, and then buried it for future re-examination and enjoyment.

Now this was not at all the sort of thing to appeal to Viola. She was smart and superficial herself, and smart and superficial people attracted her : so far she had no use for the sure and steady virtues : and because Lord Kinfell was neither quick at badinage nor skilled in repartee, she wrote him down an ass—which he certainly was not, except in his blind adoration of herself. But although she had not much opinion of the brains inside his head, she was quite alive to the importance of the coronet that surrounded it : and the idea of being Lady Kinfell was not without its glamour for this vain and frivolous young person.

Perhaps the times in which she lived as well as the circumstances of her lot had something to do with the formation of Viola's character. She was born in the late eighties and so her childhood received its earliest impress from that light-hearted and frivolous period. The girls of those days knew no responsibilities but many restraints ; and were never—except in unpreventable circumstances—brought face to face with

the realities of life. They led a sheltered existence under the shadow of their respective mothers' wings, and were never called upon to do anything more strenuous than to enjoy themselves and to select suitable husbands from the eligible swains presented to their choice. They never made a living for themselves unless compelled by adverse circumstances to do so, and then it was a misfortune alluded to with bated breath. As she had no mother, Viola was hampered with fewer restraints than most of her predecessors and contemporaries ; and, by the time she grew up, the old century had passed away. Then the new century came, with the girls belonging to it : girls with neither restraint nor responsibilities, but with a certain adventurous desire to ferret out the realities of life for themselves, and of course ferreting them out all wrong : yet thereby unconsciously preparing themselves for the great and terrible days that were coming, so that when the time did come they, as well as their brothers, should be ready to respond magnificently to their country's call.

In looking back on the first decade of this century it is interesting to note how the girls were already stirring in their nests and holding out empty hands for work to do. They were not content to sit at home or gad about as their mothers and grandmothers had done, satisfied with social and domestic duties. They wanted something more : and in due time that something more was given to them ; and they proved themselves equal and ready to bear the heavy yoke which was laid by grim war upon their young shoulders.

One often hears it said that the girls of the seventies and the eighties with their somewhat frivolous and empty lives, untouched by great responsibilities and hampered by many restraints, would not have been ready and able to do the strenuous work that the girls of to-day are doing : that is as it may be. But let it

never be forgotten that it is the girls of the seventies and the eighties who are now laying their children on the altar, and giving that which is far dearer to them than their own lives. It is the girls of the seventies and the eighties who have spared not their own sons but have given them for us all : and God Himself could give no greater Gift than that.

CHAPTER II

LORD KINFELL

IN the eyes of the World, Hugh, fourth Baron Kinfell, was a fortunate youth. And if it is a mark of the favour of Fortune for a man to find himself, when he attains his majority, a peer of the realm ; the owner of a fine, if somewhat gloomy, castle in Northumberland, and of a wooded, but equally picturesque Moat House in the pleasant county of Kent ; the possessor of an ample income, swelled by the accumulations of a long minority, with no one to exercise the slightest control over his actions : then it must be conceded that the World was right. It may, however, be doubted whether Lord Kinfell himself altogether blessed the fate which had deprived him, since early childhood, of a father's guiding hand, and of a mother's loving care—to say nothing of the absence of a brother or a sister, or indeed of any near relation save a stern uncle, of uncompromising rectitude, Calvinistic principles, and a firm conviction that anything savouring of joy or pleasure or happiness savoured also of sin ; and the wife and children of the said uncle.

Hugh was barely ten years old, when in the course of one short year he lost both his parents. His mother was the first to pass over to the Other Side ; and his father, an elderly man who was devotedly attached to his young wife, never recovered from the blow. For a few months he lingered in this world, helpless and hopeless : and then he also turned his face to the light and followed her whom his soul loved—leaving Hugh to the guardianship of his mother's

brother, Sir Stuart Farquhar. So far as the young peer's estate was concerned, his father could have made no better choice. Stuart Farquhar was an admirable man of business : and he so managed his late brother-in-law's affairs that when Hugh came of age not only was his rent-roll considerably increased, but there was a very large sum of ready money, the accumulation of a ten years' minority, at his bankers'.

Until his mother's death Hugh's life was one of unalloyed happiness. She idolised him as an only son is almost universally idolised ; yet, strange to say, she did not spoil him, as only sons are apt to be spoiled. For his part he adored his mother, who was to him the most beautiful, the most loving, the kindest of women ; yet one whose word was law, whose love never degenerated into weak indulgence. As a result, young as he was when his mother was taken from him—the greatest misfortune that can happen to a young child—seeds of honour, truth, and high principle had been sown in his young soul, which, if mingled later with seeds of another kind, were never rooted up, but grew and bore fruit in due season.

The death of his father completed the youthful misfortunes of Hugh : for it not only deprived him of the guidance of a loving father, but it also transferred him to the guardianship of a stern and unsympathetic, if well-meaning, uncle. From this time Hugh's life was chequered : his school days he enjoyed to the full : his holidays were a kind of modified purgatory. Most boys, even the ones who are happiest at school, look forward to their holidays : Hugh, on the contrary, during his holidays looked forward to school. The late Lord Kinfell had left instructions that his son should, in accordance with the traditions of the Kinfell family, go to Eton and Oxford. Sir Stuart did not altogether approve of this course. He, himself, owing to a boyish weakness

(which he outgrew), had never been sent to a public school: an omission which left its indelible mark upon his walk and conversation. Never having mingled freely with his peers until he was too old to learn the lessons acquired by such mingling, Sir Stuart had no knowledge of that guiding principle known as 'give and take.' His giving was confined to the giving of advice—his taking to the taking of offence: and that was all the give and take with which he troubled himself.

But let no one imagine that the worthy baronet pitied himself because he had been denied the advantages of a public-school education: on the contrary, he pitied all who had enjoyed them. He himself was his own standard; and he approved or disapproved of other persons according to their nearness to or distance from that embodied ideal. Therefore it not unnaturally followed that Sir Stuart regarded Eton as an overgrown establishment, where the sons of gentlemen, and of rich parvenus, wasted a certain amount of valuable time in acquiring an uncertain amount of valueless information. Still he was a man of high principle according to his limited lights, and strictly followed the letter of his late brother-in-law's instructions: and he was sensible enough to send his nephew to one of the best preparatory schools of the day. Hugh gave no signs of juvenile precocity: he had never given utterance to those brilliant phrases which are greeted by enthusiastic nurses as emanations from the brain of future Prime Ministers or embryo Lord Chancellors. He was just an average boy, with a boy's disinclination for books, and a boy's love of fresh air. He was by no means swift to hear, but he was certainly slow to speak, and emphatically slow to wrath. If not particularly quick at the uptake, he could appreciate a joke when he had had time to understand it: and his easy temper, if at times it

was mistaken and resented for indifference, made on the whole for popularity among boys and masters.

He was not particularly stupid, if he gave no signs of any special cleverness : and by the time he went to Eton, he had acquired sufficiently the rudiments of Latin and Greek and Elementary Mathematics to enable him to take a fair place in the school. On the other hand in the playing fields he made his mark. Cricket and football he loved : and when he left the preparatory school his brilliant success as an athlete seemed as certain as his comparative failure as a scholar. His career at Eton followed very much on the same lines. He did sufficiently well at his books to pass through the school without discredit : and he easily won his place in the Eleven, and scored his century against Harrow at Lord's in his last year. He was popular with his fellows : he gave himself no airs, and had sufficient sense to repel with firmness, yet with courtesy, the advances of such undesirable boys as endeavoured to lead him into ways, which they described as paths of pleasantness, but which he recognised as by no means the ways of peace.

But if, so far as school was concerned, Hugh found this world a bright and attractive place, during his holidays he was disposed to reconsider his view. Life at Drumcrag Castle, his uncle's place in Scotland, was a very different thing from life as he found it as a little boy at Ingleham Moat, his parents' favourite abode, or from life at Eton. Sir Stuart was a strong Presbyterian and a puritan of the puritans. He rejoiced in the Reformation, and only regretted that the Reformers had not gone further, and succeeded in establishing Calvinism in the English Church, and in purging her of what he considered the taint of Catholicism which still, to his great regret, was to be found in her teaching as well as in her ritual. He hated brightness and cheerfulness, music and art.

Games and amusements he regarded not merely as frivolous, but as inventions of the devil designed to lure the earnest soul from righteousness. He had found a wife very much of his own way of thinking. Wherefore it followed that his two daughters and his nephew had a very poor time. Hugh grew sick of the lengthy prayers every morning and evening : of the long dull Sundays, when the hours not spent at the kirk or at meals were supposed to be passed in the reading of improving sermons, or in learning by heart the Shorter Catechism ; of the constant reproof for the slightest boyish peccadillo ; of the constant repression of his youthful spirits. He was not naturally irreligious, but he rebelled against the God which Sir Stuart Farquhar had made in his own image, and had set up for his daughters and nephew to fall down and worship.

Hugh hated his holidays. The one alleviation of their tedium was the fact that there was excellent sport of all kinds at Drumcrag, and that the boy was a thorough sportsman to his finger-tips, and the idol of all the keepers and gillies on the estate.

In due time Hugh matriculated at Oxford, where he passed three of the pleasantest years of his life : and after scrambling through the examinations for a pass degree, he tried for a commission in the Artillery as a University Candidate. He again scrambled through the qualifying examination, and at the age of twenty-two was gazetted second lieutenant in the Royal Horse Artillery.

In appearance Hugh was no Adonis : he had dark brown hair and eyes, and a rugged face, which was redeemed from absolute ugliness by a singularly sunny if somewhat rare smile. He was an inch over six foot in his stockings, and had a fine athletic figure. He was a good shot, a capital rider to hounds, and a first-rate cricketer.

Well born, with a fine income, and a commission in the Royal Horse Artillery, he was the normal prey of every male and female adventurer, bent on the plucking of so desirable a pigeon, as they fondly imagined ; and had every possible chance of going to the devil. But as a matter of fact he had not the faintest intention of seeking the acquaintance of that potentate. He was prepared to enjoy life and liberty to the full : and enjoy it he did. No doubt, like any other young man placed in his position, he committed some follies. But he had a fund of shrewd common sense ; and those who regarded him as a pigeon to be plucked, found out very quickly their mistake.

Happily he was in little danger from the wiles of those fair ladies of attractive appearance and facile manners, who beset the path of young men, especially young men of wealth and leisure, free from parental control. He was not one to haunt the stage doors of the variety theatres, or to be seen supping at the Savoy or Carlton with the beauties of the Gaiety Chorus. Young as he was when he lost his mother, the memory of that gracious presence was sufficient to keep him straight. He was no prig, but he had an instinctive reverence for women as women : and he was much too fastidious to find any pleasure in the society of persons who were, as he would have put it, ' not quite quite.'

As for the scheming mothers, with marriageable daughters and a remarkable capacity for stalking eligible bachelors, they were no doubt a far greater danger. But as a matter of fact, they did not find Hugh an easy prey. He was singularly free from vanity : he knew that he had neither a handsome face, nor a fascinating manner : and his slowness of thought served him well, for it never occurred to him that the attractive young ladies, with whom he danced and played tennis, could care for him as a man : and in his innocence of heart he never thought that without

caring for him as a man they might still care for him as a husband.

He had a very keen appreciation of beauty : inso-much that it was certain that, untouched as his heart was up to the present, the time would come when he would meet the face that would hold him captive, and it was equally certain that the face would be a pretty one.

While at school and at Oxford, he had had little female society, and that society was of no very attractive character. His two cousins, Flora and Janet, were big, strong, athletic girls, but with no pretensions to beauty. In the old days there had been a natural alliance between Hugh and his cousins in their opposition to their common enemy, the girls' father. They had ridden together, tramped over the heather together, listened to long sermons in the Presbyterian church together, and conspired together to break the 'Sawbath' whenever they could escape from the eagle eye of Sir Stuart. But there had been no danger of Hugh's falling in love with either of his cousins. They were more like brother and sisters ; good comrades and that was all.

But Hugh was conscious in his heart of hearts that physical beauty appealed to him. Though no book-worm, he had at school read some of the great literature of Greece, Rome, and England : and he had felt the fascination of Helen of Troy, of Cleopatra, of Mary Queen of Scots, and of Beatrix Esmond : and visions of some fair Ideal floated before his mind's eye—and when the Inexpressive She appeared before him in the flesh, there was little doubt that he would fall a willing captive to her charms.

But until his battery was stationed at Woolwich he had not encountered his fate. Fair girls, charming girls, alluring girls, he had met in plenty, but none of them were for him.

It was at a dance at the Shop that Kinfell first met

Viola Chalfont. It was a merry scene. Sisters and cousins and aunts were there in full force, together with a strong contingent from the Garrison and from the neighbouring houses. Eldhurst sent her quota to join the 'giddy throng,' and with it came Colonel Chalfont and his daughter.

Kinfell had danced a duty dance or two, and was leaning lazily against the wall answering the chatter of his partner with an occasional monosyllable when Viola came into the room. As his eyes fell on her it seemed to him that the whole world had suddenly changed. There before his eyes walked the Ideal of his dreams. She was so beautiful that for a moment he could hardly believe that she was a real living woman. She seemed more like a goddess who had stooped down to earth at the call of some adoring Endymion, and had dropped in at the Academy Dance *en route*. She was dressed all in white trimmed profusely with shining silvery sequins, and this costume added to the almost supernatural effect of her dazzling loveliness. She seemed to be enveloped in a maze of snowy clouds and shimmering moonbeams, the pure whiteness of which set off the brilliance of her copper hair, deep green eyes, and rose-pink complexion.

Certainly Viola Chalfont had never looked better than she looked that night : and at the mere sight of her—before he had touched her hand or heard her voice—Hugh Kinfell loved her with all the strength of his deep and passionate nature.

There are two kinds of love : the love that loves a woman, whatever she may be, for the sake of her face : the other that loves a face, whatever it may be, for the sake of the woman who owns it. Both kinds are deep and true and abiding, and who can say which is the better of the two ? Probably only he who has experienced both.

But if Viola was, as she seemed to Kinfell's en-

raptured gaze, a goddess descended from Olympus, she was an extremely human goddess, and put on no Olympian airs and graces. She was quickly surrounded by an enthusiastic group of cadets, among whom struggled captains and subalterns from the Garrison, and even grave and grizzled field officers, all anxious to scribble their initials as often as she would permit on her programme.

If Kinfell was monosyllabic before, his partner now found him absolutely dumb. With a woman's quick intuition she saw at once that she had lost any interest he might have taken in her; and she was not slow in discovering the reason. She was a pretty girl herself, and by no means averse from dancing with, and it may be flirting with, so desirable a partner as Lord Kinfell. Yet she was philosophical, and if my lord wouldn't flirt with her, there were plenty of officers and cadets who would: so with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, she shook off the dust from her feet, so to speak, and took the arm of her partner for the next dance—a young cadet straight from Eton, who was prepared to tread on her toes, tear her dress, and then win her forgiveness with the most brazen love-making when they sat out.

Oblivious to the fact that he was engaged for the next two or three dances, Hugh remained where he was, following Viola with his eyes, as she and her partner glided through the dance.

'Who is that girl with the glorious hair, and eyes as green as the sea?' he asked a brother officer.

'Hallo, Hugh, are you growing poetical? Is Kinfell also among the poets?' replied Captain Horsfall. 'It's a clear case, my boy: you are undoubtedly caught! Do you mean to say that you've never met Viola Chalfont, old Colonel Chalfont's daughter?'

'You don't mean to say that she is the daughter of old Chalfont, do you?' said Kinfell, who had met

the Colonel once or twice when the latter was the guest of the R.A. Mess, but was not at all well acquainted with him.

‘Yes, I do,’ replied Horsfall, ‘and a remarkably handsome daughter she is, too: and she ought to be, for old Charlie was a good-looking chap himself, and his late wife, they say, was a beauty.’

‘And her daughter is a beauty too!’ replied Hugh dreamily.

The melody of the ‘Merry Widow’ waltz floated down the room, and the sweet strains had a similar effect upon this young man’s fancy, as that attributed to Spring by the late Lord Tennyson.

‘Come, buck up, old fellow,’ said Captain Horsfall, ‘if you don’t know the fair Viola, it’s about time you did. And by the same token, here is Chalfont, looking as sulky as a bear.’

And indeed the Colonel did not appear to be in the most amiable frame of mind. Truth to say, now that his dancing days were a thing of the past, Chalfont did not care much for balls, yet he felt it his duty—as she had no permanent chaperon—to take his beautiful daughter out himself. It was to his interest to see that Viola made a good match and kept clear of any entanglements with ineligible: and he did not altogether trust those casual chaperons who had their own fish to fry—that is to say their own daughters to settle in life.

‘Well, sir, and how goes the world with you?’ said Horsfall: ‘you know Kinfell, I believe. He tells me that he has never met your daughter: and I’m sure he’s dying to dance with her.’

‘I am afraid, then, his life is in serious peril,’ said Colonel Chalfont, as he shook hands with Kinfell: ‘for I am pretty sure Viola’s programme is full by now. But, come along with me,’ he added, as the last notes of the waltz died away; ‘I will introduce

you to my daughter, and we'll see what can be done."

Chalfont, in spite of his careless and improvident youth, had accumulated a fair share of worldly wisdom, and was by no means blind to the advantages of rank and wealth; therefore he was quite ready to promote a friendship between his daughter and the happy possessor of these desirable gifts.

Accompanied by Hugh, he crossed the ballroom, and by masterly strategy cut off Viola and her partner, who were making their way to a most desirable nook where they could emulate the modest violet in its anxiety to avoid observation.

'Sorry to interrupt you, my dear,' began Colonel Chalfont, 'but I want to introduce Lord Kinfell.'

Viola's partner was not particularly pleased at this interruption, and, if looks could have killed, Colonel Chalfont and his friend would have perished where they stood. Viola, however, turned to Lord Kinfell with a charming smile, and said, 'I am so delighted to come across you at last, Lord Kinfell. I've heard so much about you as a cricketer and a polo-player, that I am simply longing to know you and see if you are really as wonderful as people make out. I expect you won't be, because nobody ever is: but it is rather fascinating to have one's youthful ideals dashed to the ground in this way: nice and bracing like a cold bath, don't you know?'

Hugh muttered something about being 'honoured' or 'delighted,' or something of the sort. He didn't shine on this occasion and was perfectly conscious of the fact. Truth to tell, he was overpowered and tongue-tied before Viola's beauty: and behaved like a shy schoolboy.

Something of this Colonel Chalfont saw: and came to the conclusion that he must intervene to save the situation. He did not want his daughter to be

‘choked-off’—to use her own inelegant expression—at this early stage of her acquaintance with the wealthy young peer: for he knew by bitter experience that when once Viola was ‘choked-off’ no considerations, either worldly or otherwise, were capable of unchoking her again.

‘I expect your programme is pretty full, Viola,’ he said, ‘but you really must find a dance for Lord Kinfell. He’s dying to dance with you.’

‘Surely Lord Kinfell can ask for himself, if he is so anxious to dance with me,’ replied Viola, who was in one of her teasing moods.

By this time, Hugh had begun to recover himself.

‘Colonel Chalfont is quite right. I *am* dying to dance with you, as he puts it. I fear, I am late in the field—but if you *can* spare me a dance, Miss Chalfont, I shall be more than grateful.’

At this moment Major Smith, who was engaged to Viola for the next dance, came up to claim her. Viola glanced at her programme, and said, ‘I’m afraid I am engaged for every dance. Still as it’s the first time I’ve met you—the first offence, so to speak—I’ll let you have Number Ten, and throw over a soldier boy, who is so cheeky that he deserves snubbing. It’s a mean thing to do; but you’ll have to bear the sin on *your* conscience, because *I* haven’t got one.’

She sailed away on Major Smith’s arm, leaving Hugh in such a state of ecstacy that every one who ran—or rather, every one who danced—could read the signs of his sudden infatuation on his honest face. The Colonel smiled grimly under his moustache. He, also, had felt—possibly even looked, though that was more doubtful—like that at a Silverhampton Ball more than twenty years ago: and he had sampled to the full the dire consequences of that emotion. But it wasn’t his business to check love’s young dream by experimental teaching as to the awakening therefrom:

it was his business to get Viola comfortably settled in life,* and then to depart as gracefully as he could from a world which he had loved too well. Still even his shrivelled old heart experienced a faint sensation of compassion as he saw the expression on the young soldier's face: it was a pity to take a woman as seriously as that, he thought; and especially a woman as heartless as Viola. However all he said was:

'I used to know your father years ago; as a matter of fact we were in the same regiment at one time; but he left the Service when he married, if I remember right.'

Hugh beamed. Any link with his beloved parents was a joy to him. 'Yes, he did.'

'And I also had the pleasure of meeting your mother too, and dancing with her. She was one of the Farquhars of Drumcrag in those days, and a lovely young creature. There were two Miss Farquhars then, Jessie and Effie, and they were equally charming; but I cannot remember which of them became Lady Kinfell.'

'My mother was Effie,' replied Hugh, enjoying to the full these memories of the past.

'And they had an elder brother—Stuart by name—who was by no means as lively as they were. By the way, is he as—as—good as he used to be?' asked the Colonel cautiously.

'Better; far better,' replied Hugh with a twinkling eye. And both of the men laughed at the mere thought of Sir Stuart's unparalleled excellence.

'By Jove, he was a dull dog even in those days! He must be something stupendous by now.'

'He is,' replied Hugh with feeling: 'he brought me up after my parents died.'

'He did, did he? Poor little devil, I pity you!' remarked the Colonel genially. 'He'd have a heavy hand.'

'He had! But I'm sure he meant well and tried to do his best,' added Hugh loyally.

'He would. He really was always a good fellow at

bottom, though a bit of a mug. And what became of the elder sister, Jessie Farquhar ? ’

‘ She married a man in the Scots Fusiliers—one of the McLellans of Latchett—and died in India within a year of my mother’s death.’

The older man sighed. ‘ Ah ! they were a pretty pair, a pretty pair ; and the days when I used to dance with them were good old days ! I should like to live them over again. Make the most of your youth, my boy, for you ’ll find nothing like it later. I ’d give half my fortune—that is to say half my debts—to be young again ; and I envy with all my heart you fellows who have still your lives before you.’

Colonel Chalfont kept Hugh by his side until Number Ten, talking as charmingly as he could talk if he chose, and at the same time skilfully eliciting from the young man all that he wished to know concerning that young man’s prospects and possessions ; so that by the time Hugh was able to claim his longed-for dance, the Colonel was fully persuaded in his own mind that at last he had secured a suitable opening (so to speak) for his daughter.

Then came Number Ten dance, and Hugh entered into Ederf. He was terribly shy at first on finding himself in such close contact with such dazzling beauty : but Viola soon put him at his ease. What she did not know concerning the successful shepherding of young men was not worth the knowing. Hugh soon found himself telling her all about himself, and his dreary childhood, and his hopes and ambitions : and the shell-like ears seemed so ready to receive, and the long-lashed moss-agate eyes so ready to sympathise with everything that he said, that it never occurred to his simple soul that he was boring the *beautiful Miss Chalfont to distraction*.

At subsequent meetings this hideous fact was gradually revealed to him. Viola could simulate sympathy

to perfection, but she was too selfish to keep up the simulation for long. Still she made it a rule to let down her new admirers gently.

This then was the beginning of Hugh Kinfell's love for Viola Chalfont. He loved her for her beauty alone, quite apart from any moral or mental gifts which she might—or might not—possess : and for the sake of that marvellous beauty he was ready to lay down his very life at her feet, should she have any use for it.

In the Book of the Prophets it is written : ' I took unto me two staves : the one I called Beauty and the other I called Bands (or as it is translated in the margin—Union). ' In a like manner did Woman at the beginning of her history take unto her two staves to support her feet on her pilgrimage towards her promised land, and to act as sceptres wherewith to rule her kingdom when she entered into it. The one staff she called Beauty—meaning that physical perfection which has ever lured and delighted the eyes of men, and has moulded the destinies of nations ; that personal loveliness which made the lover of old serve seven years for Rachel his uncle's daughter and yet count them as a few days for the sake of the love he had to her, because the maid was fair to look upon. And the other staff which Woman took unto her for the shepherding of the sons of men, she called Bands—meaning the union of two souls who love and understand each other completely, and the companionship and comradeship of two hearts that are fundamentally one ; that perfect unity of spirit which caused the husband of old to cry out that favour was deceitful and beauty was vain ; but that, though many daughters had done virtuously, she whom he had chosen had excelled them all.

CHAPTER III

THE WINDYBANKS

It is true that a city which is set on a hill cannot be hid : and when that city is as beautiful as the old town of Northbridge on the Severn, no one would wish to hide it, even if such a course were possible. People who have seen both, assert that there is a strong likeness between Northbridge and Jerusalem : those of us who have only seen one, are prepared to swear that—whatever it is like or whatever it is unlike—Northbridge, as it flashes on the eye of the traveller when he reaches the summit of the Hermitage Hill on the road from Silverhampton to the West, is one of the fairest visions that was ever vouchsafed to mortal eyes. The town stands on a hill surrounded by hills ; and through the intervening valleys the Severn makes its way from its native spring to the Bristol Channel. The hill on which the dear old town is built is so steep that many of the streets are really staircases : and the summit is crowned by a beautiful church, a red-brick grammar-school, and a black-and-white town hall, all of great antiquity. The church is built of that rose-coloured stone, peculiar to the Midlands, which always looks as if it retained the hue of the many sunrises and sunsets that have glorified it ; and it has one of the ornate square towers of those parts : while at the other end of the town there stands a church of later date, with the white sides and pepper-pot top of the Georgian period, but still also picturesque in its own way. In the lower part of the town, close to the river, is the fine black-and-white half-

timbered old mansion where Bishop Percy collected his *Anecdotes* and composed his *Reliques*: and in the upper part of the town, close to the church, stands the small thatched cottage where Richard Baxter wrote his *Saints' Rest*, and penned one of the most beautiful hymns that ever was written: all work worth doing, but methinks that the work done in the cottage was the greater work of the two.

At the edge of the town, near the church with the pepper-pot, in a large and beautiful garden there stands a fine red Georgian house: and in this house in the latter half of the last century there dwelt a doctor, by name George Windybank, with his gently bred wife and his three handsome daughters. The house was large and comfortable, and had that stately air of spacious graciousness which is peculiar to the houses of the Georgian era. The garden was of the kind that our grandparents called 'hanging,' though why it is difficult to say. The 'hanging gardens' of Babylon, we are led to believe, really did hang: but the 'hanging gardens' of our immediate forefathers did nothing of the kind. They merely, so to speak, ran up and down stairs, carpeting their staircase with all manner of trees and shrubs and beautiful flowers. There were layers of Dr. Windybank's garden all down the face of the steep cliff, each layer seeming gayer and prettier than its predecessor: until at last they ended in one of the streets of stairs, which ran straight down to the road beside the river.

The view from the windows of the house and from the top layer of the garden was magnificent; and the air was even better, as the west wind came straight across the Welsh mountains from the Irish Sea.

Dr. Windybank was a singularly handsome man: and—as is frequently the way with singularly handsome people of both sexes—had married decidedly above his station. Mrs. Windybank had not her

husband's good looks—in fact she had no looks at all, save such as are expressed by that meek and quiet spirit which is, according to S. Peter, so valuable an asset in a wife—but she was of far better birth and breeding than her husband: yet she regarded him with that indiscriminating adoration which plain, retiring women often lavish upon men of a less refined and more florid type.

The Windybanks lived in a time of definite hues and clearly drawn distinctions, before the half-tints and subtle mergings of the present day had come into fashion. In their time people were considered either good or bad as the case might be, and there the matter ended: there were no hybrids among the sheep and the goats. In the same way the women of that generation were pronounced either plain or handsome; such words as *charming*, *interesting*, *alluring* and the like rarely escaped from their native dictionary. The classes were divided in the same definite manner: they hardly mixed at all: whilst varying schools of religious thought were separated and labelled as if they had been drugs in a store. This system saved a good deal of trouble and searching of heart, while on the other hand it involved a considerable amount of injustice. It was a dogmatic age: and dogma entered into the smallest matters.

Thus it happened that Dr. Windybank was classified as a goat and his wife as a sheep by their small circle of friends and acquaintances: and if by any chance the doctor performed a good action or his spouse a less admirable one, the judgments were not reversed, but the two persons in question were condemned as guilty of infringement of copyright. In those days the lines

‘There’s so much good in the worst of us
And so much bad in the best of us,
That it ill behoves any of us
To find fault with the rest of us,’

had not been written : and no one would have understood them if they had.

The doctor had been what is called 'gay' in his youth ; and his middle-age found him choleric, materially minded, and extremely selfish. Mrs. Windybank was what in those days was called 'an angel of a woman,' and these days is known as 'a perfect dear.' She was unselfishness personified : and her married life had done everything to strengthen and stimulate this admirable quality. She had two abiding sorrows in her calm and uneventful existence : one that her husband was not what was generally known as a religious man : and the other that she had no son to follow (most probably) in his erring father's footsteps, and to succeed finally to that father's medical practice. Mrs. Windybank was devoted to and very proud of her three handsome daughters ; but she was one of that large class of women who always consider the other sex vastly superior to their own. As she regarded herself both physically and mentally as inferior to her good-looking husband, so she regarded her three daughters as inferior to the supposititious brother with whom Providence never saw fit to favour them.

And there was no doubt that the Miss Windybanks formed a most striking trio. They were tall for that generation, though nowadays they would only have been accounted of middle height : and they all three inherited their father's good features, and striking colouring—his coppery curly hair, and eyes of the colour of moss-agates. People are always proud of a family characteristic even if it is not a beautiful one : witness the thick under-lip of the Hapsburgs, and the excessive nose of many a humbler family, which has been forgiven its size on account of its hereditary nature : but when it is beautiful as well as hereditary, a family trait is indeed a joy for ever.

So it was with what the Windybanks called 'the Windybank colouring.' This celebrated 'colouring'—which they always spoke of as if it were a tangible heirloom—consisted of copper-coloured hair, grey-green eyes, and pink-and-white complexions. True, in later life the doctor's pink-and-white erred on the side of redness ; but in his early youth he was always described by his admiring friends as 'too fair for a boy.' Mrs. Windybank, with her mouse-coloured hair, pasty complexion, and pale blue eyes, always regarded her red-and-white husband and children with admiring amazement, as if she could not understand how they did it : just as she gazed almost with awe at their hair which curled of itself, whilst the nights of her less fortunate youth had been regularly disturbed by curling rags, the results of which evaporated an hour or two after her recalcitrant locks were released from their uneasy bonds.

In most families there is an official Beauty before whose shrine her less favoured relatives burn continual incense. If the good looks of this young lady are sufficiently pronounced to be recognised by the outside world as well as by her immediate circle, all well and good : the airs and graces—frequently even the selfishness and pettishness—engendered by her official status will be condoned and overlooked, though it is quite on the cards that her husband will not altogether have an easy time of it. But if, on the other hand, her beauty exists only in the eye of her beholding family—if it is merely a home product—then sorely indeed will that unwise family have to suffer for its unwisdom. The world will not perceive the beauty which was supposed to excuse the airs and graces, and therefore will not tolerate the airs and graces which the home-made beauty was considered to excuse : and the poor 'Beauty' herself, who was really no 'Beauty' at all, and who might have grown

into a nice, pleasant woman if only she had been taught to do so early enough, will develop into a soured and embittered creature, with all the real defects of imaginary qualities.

Now the Beauty of the Windybank family was Julia, the second daughter. She had all the faults of an accredited family Beauty—she was vain, selfish, frivolous, and headstrong—but all the same she was a real Beauty. Doubtless she had all the worst defects of her qualities; but she possessed the qualities in full measure as well. Her parents had spoilt her, and her sisters had spoilt her, and the whole town of Northbridge had spoilt her: and when—after the first raptures of the honeymoon were over—her husband declined to carry on the spoiling process, requiring instead that the treatment should be applied to himself, the beautiful Julia could not stand it: she simply turned her lovely face to the wall, and slowly died.

The three Miss Windybanks were very much alike—all were tall, all had good figures, and all had inherited the famous ‘Windybank colouring’—but while all were undoubtedly good-looking, Julia was the only one who possessed a touch of real beauty. Beauty is to good looks what genius is to talent: a different thing not only in degree but also in kind. Good looks are common enough, talent is common enough, but beauty is not an excess of one any more than genius is an excess of the other. Beauty and genius are rare and precious gifts; and a touch of either of them sets the possessor apart from his or her fellows to a certain extent. There is something regal about them; and some of the divinity which doth hedge a king, hedges those to whom these rare and sometimes dangerous gifts are given.

Of the other two Miss Windybanks, Caroline, the elder, was the handsomer; while Lucy was as pretty a creature as one could meet with on a summer’s day.

She possessed an exquisite daintiness which was as charming as it was rare : and though she might not be really beautiful, as Julia was, she sometimes ran her fairly close, to use her father's expression.

There was another Windybank characteristic—not as striking as their good looks, but perhaps as effective and attractive in its own line—which the Northbridge doctor handed on to his descendants ; and that was a strong sense of humour aided by a decidedly sharp tongue. This gift passed over Julia : in fact Julia was so busy being beautiful that she had not time to be clever as well : but even she was able to hand it on to her only child. Caroline received it in its fulness ; and Lucy was endowed with it to a very modified extent, but not in such rich abundance as were her offspring.

At the bottom of his rakish heart Dr. Windybank cherished a certain fear of his eldest daughter. He had no fear of his wife—and not much, alas ! of his Maker—before his eyes ; but he lived in a wholesome dread of Caroline. Between Caroline and her mother there existed that deep and unique attachment which oftentimes unites a mother and her eldest daughter : a bond somewhat different from if not closer than that between a woman and the rest of her children. In a way the eldest daughter acts as a sort of medium between a mother and the younger children, as she seems more or less on a par with both : and therefore the mother leans on her and looks up to her in a way in which she leans upon and looks up to none of the others. Mrs. Windybank was very proud of Julia and very fond of Lucy : but the darling of her heart was Caroline.

Caroline's opinion was the last word on any matter, as far as her mother was concerned : if Caroline said a thing was so, it was so, in Mrs. Windybank's creed, and nothing could alter it except a change of Caroline's

mind ; and that was a most unusual event, as the eldest Miss Windybank's mind was not of the changing order. Mrs. Windybank admired Caroline as the wisest and cleverest of created beings, and Caroline in return revered her mother as the best and saintliest : so that things were quite as they should be between these two.

It is true that Mrs. Windybank's love for her first-born was tempered with a certain amount of wholesome awe ; and the gentle soul frequently endeavoured—and generally endeavoured in vain—to conceal the shortcomings of the rest of the family from Caroline's keen and not always merciful eyes. She always hoped that Caroline would not notice when the doctor was extravagant or Julia was silly or Lucy was stupid : but Caroline invariably did, and scolded the culprits accordingly, in spite of her mother's tender pleadings on their behalf.

Dr. Windybank, on the contrary, had merely an official affection for his eldest daughter : he had no real liking for her beyond his natural feelings as a father : he was too much frightened of her tongue ; and George Windybank was one with S. Peter in his admiration for meek and quiet female spirits, if in nothing else. The doctor cherished an inordinate admiration for and pride in Julia's beauty, though in common with the rest of the family he found her exacting and a little exhausting at times : but his special favourite was Lucy ; who although (or perhaps because) she was not as clever as Caroline or as beautiful as Julia, did everything that he wished and agreed with everything that he said, and so suited him down to the ground.

Such was the Windybank household in the earlier eighties ; but it did not long remain in that condition.

First, Julia met Captain Chalfont at one of the Silverhampton balls, where as usual she was the reign-

ing belle: and he fell in love with and married her amid much local excitement and ringing of bells. After five years of wedded life, which left little to be added to the complete disillusionment of either Captain or Mrs. Chalfont, the latter departed this life, leaving one child, a daughter of three, endowed with more than her mother's share of the Windybank beauty.

Not long after Julia's marriage Lucy was wooed and won by William Lane, a young doctor whom her father had recently taken into partnership. They had two children, namely Willie, who was the same age as Viola Chalfont, and Barbara, who was a year younger. These two were the very apples of their grandmother's eyes; and as they lived in a house only a stone's-throw from hers, she was able to enjoy their youthful society to her heart's content. But even she, with all her adoration, could not deny that the Windybank beauty had passed these children by. Willie Lane was a thoroughly healthy and wholesome and plain little boy, with his father's brown hair and eyes and decidedly turn-up nose: and although Barbara had inherited the Windybank colouring in a marked degree, with the Windybank brains thrown in, she altogether lacked that remarkable handsomeness which was the distinguishing trait of the Windybank family. If handsome really were as handsome does—which it never was and never will be, whatever the proverb may assert—the little Lanes would have far surpassed Viola Chalfont: but as it was, the latter alternately shocked and fascinated her virtuous little cousins, and was constantly leading them into mischief during her rare visits to Northbridge.

To every one's surprise the eldest Miss Windybank did not follow her sisters' example. The years went by, and she still remained Miss Windybank. Not that she did not have her full share of lovers—she was far too attractive for that—but none of these

lovers succeeded in touching her heart. It is perhaps difficult even in these enlightened and enfranchised days to believe that any woman deliberately selects the single state, unless such selection is forced upon her by adverse circumstances ; and it was ten times more difficult to believe when Caroline Windybank was young. Her friends used to shake their heads over her and insinuate that ' she must have had a disappointment ' : but, to be perfectly candid, Caroline had never had anything of the kind. She had never met a man whom she liked half as well as she liked her mother, so she never could have married for love : and she was far too good-looking to marry just ' for the say of the thing '—to show that she could marry if she wanted to—as so many less obviously attractive women did in those days. She had had quite enough of the male sex in her father—more than enough sometimes : and as he had been her misfortune, she saw no necessity to make another man her fault : so she refused her numerous offers, and stayed at home with her mother.

Not long after Julia's death, Dr. Windybank was thrown from his horse in a point-to-point race, and so severely injured that he only lived for a few months afterwards : and then Lucy's husband took on the whole practice, and reigned in his father-in-law's stead.

That was a happy time for Mrs. Windybank, though she would have considered it a disgrace to her widowhood to admit as much. She could now adore and idealise her departed husband in peace, as she had adored and idealised him in her early married life, before his extravagance and self-indulgence had begun to make life difficult for her : she had Caroline at her right hand, to make up her mind for her and to guide her judgment in all things : she had Lucy living within a stone's-throw, to be talked to and chatted with about every day's pro-

ceedings : and, best of all, she had her beloved grandchildren close at hand to pet and spoil to her loving heart's content. Also in those days Julia's little daughter formed part of the family circle, and frequently used to come for long visits to her grandmother's house ; and Mrs. Windybank loved her almost, though not quite, as much as she loved Willie and Barbara Lane.

This halcyon state lasted for some years ; and then a great blow fell upon Mrs. Windybank. By this time a country doctor's practice was not what it used to be, as the rage for specialists had come in, and well-to-do patients began to repair to the large towns in order to consult well-known men who, so to speak, spread themselves on one particular organ ; thus leaving the country doctor nothing to cure but the diseases of poorer patients and the trifling ailments of richer ones—not a particularly lucrative livelihood. Just when his Northbridge practice was appreciably on the decline, Dr. Lane heard from an uncle in New Zealand urging him to come out there and share his (the uncle's) not inconsiderable fortune, and incidentally start a practice where a doctor was sorely needed. Dr. Lane wisely accepted this invitation and went to live in New Zealand, taking with him Lucy and the two children, and with them the light of Mrs. Windybank's eyes : and she and Caroline stayed on in the old house in Northbridge.

As has been said before, Harriet Windybank was not a handsome woman, neither was she a clever one : the fate which had distributed these gifts amongst her husband and children had passed her by. But she possessed one gift which they all lacked (except perhaps Caroline) ; she was very wise ; and her wisdom had long ago taught her that there is no form of exercise so exhausting and at the same time so useless as that known as kicking against the pricks :

therefore Mrs. Windybank never kicked. She had learned to submit to the inevitable, however much it might hurt her : and she wasted none of her strength in endeavouring to alter what her wisdom told her was unalterable. Thereby she saved herself and those connected with her much unnecessary wear and tear.

For a long while Viola's visits to Northbridge had become fewer and farther between. As she grew older her aunt's mild rule and the peaceful atmosphere irked her more and more : and after her cousins went to the Antipodes, she flatly declined to visit Northbridge again. As usual she had her own way : and so her poor grandmother was doubly bereft.

At the time that this story begins the sorrow of the Lanes' departure and the Chalfonts' defection had long ago become things of the past : and Mrs. Windybank—with the adaptability to circumstances of meek and quiet spirits—was happy once more. She was kept cheerful by Caroline's breezy companionship : and the letters from New Zealand were a never-failing source of joy and interest. The Lanes had prospered on the other side of the world. Willie was learning to be a doctor, so as to help his father and finally to step into that father's shoes ; and—according to his mother's letters—he was going to be quite the greatest doctor that any hemisphere had as yet produced. As for Barbara, she was a good and clever girl, but not really pretty, her mother reported : and the family photographs, with which Mrs. Windybank and Caroline were literally bombarded from the other side of the world, supported this testimony.

'The dear child has a sweet face, but she isn't exactly pretty,' remarked Mrs. Windybank one morning at breakfast, when the latest instalment of photographs from New Zealand had just arrived.

'Lucy said she wasn't,' replied Caroline, who was presiding over the teapot at the other end of the

old-fashioned dining-room : ' and if your own mother says you aren't good-looking, you aren't.'

' Yet she comes of such a handsome family,' repeated Mrs. Windybank, as if she were gently expostulating with that all-wise Providence which had seen fit to withhold from Barbara Lane the gift of beauty.

' We are handsome enough,' retorted Caroline, who always called a spade a spade : ' but I can't say as much for the Lanes ; and as for William, he was always downright plain, and so is Willie.'

Mrs. Windybank ruffled her feathers like a hen whose offspring is threatened. ' Willie has a dear face,' she cried.

' I never said he hadn't, Mother : I only said he'd a plain one—which he has. Not that looks matter in a man.'

' Your poor father was a remarkably handsome man, Caroline.'

' And much good it did him !' retorted the unfilial Miss Windybank.

' You and your sisters were remarkably pretty girls,' persisted the fond parent.

' And much good it did us either ! Julia's looks were entirely responsible for her marriage to that fool, Charlie Chalfont : he'd never have looked at her if she hadn't been pretty, and so much the better for her ! As for me, I've kept single all my life, thank Heaven ! and I could have done as much as that with a turn-up nose and a squint. It doesn't take much beauty to enable a girl to keep single. While as for Lucy, any plain girl would have been good enough for William Lane : it doesn't require a face like Lucy's to bait the trap for such a tame bird as William.'

' I sometimes wonder if you'd have been happier married, my dear,' remarked Mrs. Windybank,

coquetting, as we are all prone to do, with misfortunes which have missed us.

'There's no need for any wonder on that score, Mother: you'll be wondering soon if we shouldn't all have walked better if we'd been born with three legs.'

'Your sisters married,' gently expostulated Mrs. Windybank, whose gentle heart was always riven by the conflicting emotions of distress that her firstborn had failed to take the pass degree of womanhood, and joy that her favourite daughter remained at her side.

'I know they did, and that's what choked me off. Nobody could pretend that it was anything but misery to be married to that extravagant ass, Charlie Chalfont: and if you try to convince me that perfect happiness lay in the hollow of William Lane's fat and clammy hand, I simply decline to believe you, though you are my mother, and the best mother that ever lived.'

'Still, Caroline, a husband is a great interest in a woman's life.'

'So is a chicken-run—and far less trouble and worry.'

'And think of the happiness of children—dear little children of your own,' continued Mrs. Windybank with a gentle sigh.

'And think of the anxiety and responsibility of them!' retorted the redoubtable Caroline. 'I wouldn't have the bother of children of my own for anything. And if one is such a glutton for trouble that one can't get on without it, other people's children will always provide an ample supply for the most voracious appetite.'

'You certainly had the burden of Julia's and Lucy's children when they were little,' admitted Mrs. Windybank: 'if looking after such little darlings can be called a burden,' she hastily corrected herself.

‘Of course I did : that was only natural. If there is one unmarried woman in a family, that woman is always turned into a sort of ashpit for the rest of the family’s troubles. When they can stand their worries no longer, they tip them out on to her. That’s the fate of the maiden aunt—to become a waste-paper basket for anything that the rest of the family don’t want!’

‘Then why did you select such a fate, my dear?’ asked Mrs. Windybank with some pertinence. ‘You’d plenty of opportunities of changing your state.’

Caroline laughed. ‘For the good reason that other people’s troubles are easier to bear than your own. If you are married you’ve got to bear your own troubles, and if you’re single you’ve got to bear other people’s; and for my part I don’t think other people’s hurt as much as your own. And then you haven’t got to bear other people’s husbands : that I never could do. I can’t bear Charlie Chalfont and I can’t bear William Lane. To me they are most tiresome and uninteresting persons, and always will be.’

‘I wonder what Charlie is doing now.’

‘I can tell you : spending his money and spoiling his daughter, just as he has been doing for the last twenty years.’

Mrs. Windybank’s tired face was wistful. ‘I should like to see dear Viola again.’

‘Then I fear, Mother, you won’t get what you like. Viola is far too grand for the likes of us. I’ve no patience with the way Charlie has kept her away from us all these years. We mayn’t be as aristocratic as the Chalfonts but we are gentlepeople in our way; and anyhow we are her own mother’s people. If we aren’t fit to be Charlie’s friends, Julia wasn’t fit to be his wife : what’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the goslings. And when all is said and done, *your* people

are as good as the Chalfonts any day, even if father's weren't.'

'That is true, my dear : but when I married your dear father I took his position and was proud to do so because of the great love I bore him : still I never pretended even to myself that things were different from what they were, or that I could expect to take the same position as a country doctor's wife as I took as a country squire's daughter. I have got to the time of life when I see how comparatively trifling such things as rank and wealth are when compared with such real blessings as the love of husband and children and the Grace of God. But all the same the minor things have their value, and it is foolish to pretend that they haven't : in fact it is just as foolish to underrate them as to overrate them. Therefore, my dear, it is no use shutting your eyes to the fact that—from a worldly point of view—Charles Chalfont was socially in a much better position than poor Julia. And if he thinks that we cannot introduce Viola into as good society as he desires for her as his daughter, I cannot deny that he is right.'

Miss Windybank fairly snorted. 'I've no patience with you, Mother : you're lacking in proper pride.'

Her mother smiled. 'Not in proper pride, my child ; but I hope in the pride that isn't proper. I'm getting too old now to care much for the things of this world ; they have to a great extent lost their interest for me ; but I trust I'm not too old to perceive that they still exist, and to estimate them at their right value. I have learnt that our principal duty is to render unto God the things that are God's ; but I hope I haven't forgotten that it is our secondary duty to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.'

Again Miss Windybank snorted : she was always a little apt to ride roughshod over the things that were Caesar's when they didn't fall in with her own wishes.

Her mother continued : ' I greatly dislike these modern socialistic ideas that birth and rank are of no account, and that one man is as good as another. There always have been different social grades and always will be, and I am prepared to uphold these old-fashioned ideas even when it is to my own disadvantage. It is the disregard of them that will some day ruin this country. But all the same,' she added with a sigh as she rose from the breakfast table, ' I do wish that Charles Chalfont would give us the happiness of now and then seeing dear Julia's daughter.'

CHAPTER IV

MAN PROPOSES

COLONEL CHALFONT was very unhappy. Both physically and financially he was in an unsatisfactory condition; and his long-dormant paternal instincts awoke out of their lengthy doze, and worried him considerably as to what was to become of his beautiful Viola, should he be taken from her.

Meantime Captain Lord Kinfell was hardly less unhappy than the Colonel. His adoration of Miss Chalfont grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength; yet he saw no hopes of the surcease of his misery and the fulfilment of his hopes.

And Viola was quite indifferent to all this misery that she was causing. It had never been her custom to trouble herself about the sufferings of others, and she had no intention of forming this exhausting habit.

‘Old dear, why are you so dreadfully anxious for me to marry in haste and repent at leisure? Think what an awfully long leisure I should have to repent in, if I began it now!’ she remarked one summer’s afternoon when she and her father were sitting and smoking in the orangery at the end of the garden at Eldhurst House. It was not as usual for girls to smoke then as it is now; but Viola—always ahead of her time—had adopted the practice.

‘Because, as I am tired of telling you, I am breaking up, and I shall have hardly anything to leave you when I am gone.’

‘Why meet troubles half-way? Think of the

creaking gate that never has a turning, and buck yourself up. You really aren't half as old as you are painted, as the lady's maid said to her mistress.'

Colonel Chalfont sighed. 'You are like the old Scotch beauty who replied, when asked why she had never married, "I wadna look at the walkers, and the riders all gaed by."'

'But the riders don't all gae by in my case, and I make eyes at all the walkers that I see; so I'm not a bit like your old Scotch beauty. And, by the way, you oughtn't to call anybody *Scotch* now: the *chic* thing is to say *Scottish*, with the accent on the first syllable because it couldn't be anywhere else. And you never call anybody a *Scotchman* now unless you want to be rude and offensive—you always refer to him as a *Scot*. You see I'm up to all these modern tricks and can give you no end of tips about them. But there are limits even to my knowledge: I don't know whether it is the correct thing to say *butter-scottish*, or to stick to the *butterscotch* of our childhood.'

'Really, Viola, what nonsense you talk!'

'I know, old dear; and have seen you enjoy it! If I talked sense to you, you'd soon be out of your depth, and I should hate to make you feel uncomfortable. Besides it's bad manners to make people feel uncomfortable: you've often told me so.'

The Colonel stifled a chuckle. 'Well, you've made a good many poor devils feel uncomfortable when you turned them down.'

'Not uncomfortable, dearest: I am far too accomplished a proposal-refuser to do anything as clumsy as that. Unhappy, if you like, and wild and sad and despairing: but never, *never* anything so *bourgeois* as uncomfortable.'

'Suppose anything happened to me, would you go and live at Northbridge with your poor mother's people?' asked the distracted father.

Viola gave a little shriek : ' Who is talking nonsense now ? And you really needn't trouble to do it to me, as even your most extravagant sense (and you can be very extravagant at times, you know) wouldn't put me out of my depth : nothing ever does.'

' Then you wouldn't go and live at Northbridge ? ' persisted the Colonel.

' Of course not. How could I ? Now—man to man—can you picture me growing under a mossy stone on the banks of the Severn ? Do I look like it ? ' And Viola rose from her deck-chair with grace and agility, and made a deep curtsy. To rise from a deck-chair with grace and agility may not be a particularly clever performance ; but it is a very young one.

Her father looked at her with ill-concealed pride. ' Dash it, no you don't,' he admitted : ' but all the same it 's a pretty place.'

' And all the same I 'm a pretty girl : and pretty places are generally too dull for pretty girls.'

' Confound it, child, don't talk any more nonsense ! Decide once for all to marry Kinfell, and set my poor old mind at ease about you.'

Viola shook her head. ' That 's all very well : but I want to set my poor young mind at ease ; and I 'm by no means sure that marrying Lord Kinfell would do the trick. Besides, he is a rider, and so he might begin to " gae by " at any moment, like your Scotch—no, I mean Scottish—friends : and according to you I 'd better keep my eyes fixed on the Infantry.'

The Colonel laughed. ' Kinfell will never " gae by " as long as you are there.'

Viola laughed too. The ' ganging by ' of the excellent young peer appealed to the humour of both of them. ' Not he ! If he did, perhaps I should begin to gang after him.'

' And you 'd look deuced well in a coronet, my dear,

and make a very handsome mistress of Ingleham.' Thus the Colonel who knew his Viola.

'Old darling I should look deuced well in anything. In fact I can't help looking deuced well whatever I wear: it's "pretty Fanny's way." And I don't mind at all: it gives me much pleasure to give you all so much pleasure in just looking at me.'

'You conceited minx!'

'Of course I am conceited and have every reason to be. How can I help it when my friends and my mirror never leave off telling me how good-looking I am? And now I'm off to arrange some roses for dinner—I mean for the dinner-table. If I don't go at once some of the riders and walkers from Woolwich, as you call them, will drop in to tea, and I shall have no time for the roses because the love among them will crowd them out. And then I shall be so busy remembering to look at the walkers that I shan't be able to attend to the riders at all: and I'll bet you anything you like that the riders'll never gang by as long as my name's Viola Chalfont: and probably not even when it isn't.' So with a peck at the tip of her parent's head Miss Chalfont disappeared, leaving that parent to his gloomy meditations.

Not only did his daughter's doubtful prospects worry Colonel Chalfont; the limitations of her character perplexed and grieved him sorely.

He had been brought up in the Victorian tradition that a woman is of necessity a clinging and a loving creature: and Viola's frank carelessness and callousness shocked him considerably. Her mother had loved, until his extravagance and selfishness had killed that love, and had clung until death finally destroyed her tenaciousness: therefore he could not understand the attitude of the new generation of women who were as indifferent to men as they were independent of them. Colonel Chalfont had been a

bad father, as he had been a bad husband. He had troubled his head about neither his daughter's education nor his daughter's prospects. But as far as in him lay to love anybody, he had loved Viola : and that remnant of his conscience which awoke at the same time as the remnant of his parental instinct, told him that to leave a girl as beautiful as Viola penniless and unprotected was by no means a commendable proceeding. He was now practically living upon his pension, and was considerably in debt as well : so that there would be nothing to leave his daughter at the time of his decease—a time which, his doctor had warned him, could not be very far distant. With all his heart he wished that she would marry Lord Kinfell : but he was at his wits' end as to how to induce her to take this prudent step.

Now although Viola was quite as callous as her father thought her, she was not quite as careless. Under all her vanity and frivolity she hid a very shrewd perception as to which side her bread was buttered ; and she fully realised that Lord Kinfell possessed considerable buttering power. She was one of those high-spirited creatures who derive real enjoyment from teasing their fellows : and therefore she deliberately concealed from her father the fact that Kinfell's wooing did not leave her altogether indifferent to the man himself : love had never touched her heart and did not touch it now : but she appreciated—none better!—the advantages which a marriage with him would entail ; and she was gradually working round to a decision to avail herself of those advantages. She was too selfish to trouble herself unnecessarily about her father's failing health. She did not love him : she had never yet loved anybody : and she saw through him far too clearly for the vision to arouse in her more than a tolerant and half-contemptuous affection. But she

realised that she could not live alone if anything happened to him : and she was prepared to endure most things rather than the quietude of Northbridge and the sheltering wings of her maternal aunt and grandmother.

‘It seems to me,’ she said to herself, one morning when she was sitting on the edge of the bridge over the moat, throwing crumbs to the swans that were reflected in the still water, ‘that Master Kinfell is rapidly becoming Hobson’s choice. None of the others are half as rich as he is, though few of them are quite as dull : and if the pater is, really as ill as he thinks (though I hope to goodness he isn’t, poor old dear !), it seems to me that I shall be rather up a tree. Nothing will ever induce me to live with those old cats at Northbridge—nothing : I couldn’t stick it for a month : never having had a horrid old woman over me, ordering me about and spoiling all my fun, I’m not going to begin it now. Kinfell is awfully stupid : but he wouldn’t be anything like as bad as a grandmother and an aunt : after all there’s only one of him, and there would be two of them. And then I can always get my own way with men : and you never know with women : they’re jealous and conscientious and all sorts of horrid things. I shall love being a ladyship : it always sounds so attractive : and I shall adore having heaps of money. Of course I shall be bored to death by Kinfell himself : but I needn’t see much of him : and he means well, and will let me have my own way in everything. I don’t think I’m capable of falling in love with anybody : and I’m jolly glad I’m not : it makes people look such idiots and upsets them a lot as well. Of course it was futile of father to talk about “the riders ganging by” in my case : I shall always get plenty of lovers. But it doesn’t follow they’ll all of them be peers, and I seem to fancy a coronet : I should think it would be very comfortable wear, and suit me down to the ground.’

Here the maiden meditation took a more melancholy turn : Colonel Chalfont's story about the Scottish beauty rankled. ' Still it would be positively awful if all the riders did " gae by," as father suggested, after all ; and that the lovers of my later years were all what he calls " walkers." You never can tell. And it's no good shutting my eyes to the fact that I shan't wear as well as slight girls do. I dare say I shall get stout as I get older, and how perfectly sickening that'll be ! ' And Viola fairly groaned in spirit. ' If I get stout I can't blame the riders if they do go by : I can't expect them to haul up a fat woman on to the pillion behind them, and ride off with her. There's no doubt that my face is my fortune, and a very respectable fortune too : but my figure is far from being all I wish—or rather it is in danger of being considerably more than I wish—and then where shall I be ? I do hate women with pretty faces stuck on the summits of mountains of flesh, and it is borne in upon me that this will be my ultimate fate. As I make my bed, so must I lie upon it, even if I am so fat that I overflow on both sides : and it is up to me now to ensure that it's a bed of roses ; but that may not be so easy of attainment in the stout and distant future. Heigho ! ' And Miss Chalfont sighed as she sat upon the parapet of the old bridge and threw more bits of bread to the swans below.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of steps coming up the lime avenue which led to the moat. ' Hello ! ' she laughed to herself as she turned her pretty head and saw Lord Kinfell approaching her : ' here comes one of the riders who hasn't got it in him to gae by, so I must see about that bed of roses which is to be the provision for my plump and penniless future. Oh, what a life ! ' Then she added aloud, as her adorer was now within hearing : ' Good morning, Lord Kinfell. Come and behave like a perfect

little gentleman and help me to cast my bread upon the waters. You can sit beside me if you like, though the bridge—being about five hundred years old—isn't guaranteed to carry more than the ordinary traffic of the district : but I expect it will stand us, as you are thinner than you were, and I 'm not nearly as stout as I 'm going to be.'

'Nonsense !' replied Kinfell, taking the proffered hand and the proffered seat with ecstasy in his eyes : 'you 'll never grow stout ; you couldn't be anything that wasn't the perfection of grace and beauty,' he added with the admirable if unfounded faith of the devout lover ; 'you 'll always be A 1. "Age cannot wither nor custom stale" you, as Shakespeare remarked.'

Viola shook her head sadly. 'Yes : you're right there. Age will never wither *me*, worse luck : it 'll take the opposite course—you see if it doesn't.'

'Whatever course it takes it will never make you anything but the most beautiful woman that ever lived. I'd stake my last shilling upon that.'

'You're very kind,' replied Viola, throwing Lord Kinfell a bewitching glance from under her long lashes, 'but I'm afraid you are flattering me. As my old nurse used to say, "Those who live longest will see most" ; and they certainly will, as far as I am concerned. I shouldn't be surprised—given that you have health and strength—if you live to see me fourteen stone at the very least.'

The young man threw back his head and laughed. 'You can't have too much of a good thing, you know, Miss Chalfont.'

Viola sighed. Think of marrying a man who could utter such a banal platitude as that ! She fairly quailed at the prospect awaiting her should she make up her mind to follow her father's advice. 'You

shouldn't say things like that, Lord Kinfell,' she remarked in a softly reproachful voice.

The young man looked surprised. He was rarely if ever able to follow his fair goddess's train of thought. 'But why on earth not? It's quite true.'

'Oh! dear no, it isn't: it's absolutely false. For instance a nose is a good thing, but you wouldn't like one that trailed along the ground after you, like the prince's in the fairy-tale: and lemon-squash is a good thing, but you wouldn't like to be a second Noah, paddling your own canoe on a flood of lemon-squash. But it isn't the untruth that I mind—I never do mind an untruth if it's a pleasant one: what I mind is the utter stupidity of saying a thing that millions of equally stupid people have said before you.'

The merriment died out of Kinfell's face. It always cut him to his faithful heart when Viola snubbed him. 'I'm awfully sorry I'm such a silly ass,' he said humbly: 'but it seems as if I was made like that and couldn't help it.'

'You should try to help it,' replied his stern mistress.

'I do try. I try most awfully hard not to be such an ass when I'm with you, because I know how you hate asses. But it seems that the harder I try the more futile I get. It's confounded hard luck on me!'

A tender-hearted woman would have been touched by the look of appealing misery in the honest brown eyes: but Miss Chalfont's heart was anything but tender. Sentiment simply bored her. 'Half a century of this!' she thought to herself: 'how on earth shall I endure it?'

'I say, Viola,' said Kinfell, his boyish voice trembling a little: 'I'm going to make an ass of myself again, but you look so confoundedly pretty this morning that I can't help it. I simply *must* tell you

how frightfully much I love you : no fellow could help it when you look as you 're looking now.'

Miss Chalfont gave her lover an appealing glance. Though her thoughts were not altogether under her own control, her eyes were. 'Tell me exactly how much,' she urged sweetly : 'I should like to know the precise amount, and whether you measure it by troy weight or avoirdupois.'

'I can't measure it, it's past measuring,' replied the young man simply : 'it's just infinite. You're all the world to me, Viola, and I adore the very ground you walk on. I know I'm such a stupid ass that I can't express it all properly, but the cleverest man in the world couldn't love you more than I do. Of course I know I'm not fit to black your boots or tie your shoe-string, but if you could only make up your mind to marry me, unworthy though I am, I'd devote the whole of my life to making you happy.' It was to Hugh Kinfell's credit that at that moment the thought of how much he had to offer to a retired officer's penniless daughter never crossed his mind : but it crossed the mind of the practical Miss Chalfont, and left its mark there. She knew exactly the worth of the wealth and the coronet and all the other material blessings which were lying at her feet on Eldhurst Bridge that summer morning. The value of the other gifts—the love and the care and the faithful adoration of a good and honest man—which were also lying at her feet she was not able to estimate so correctly. Viola Chalfont had nothing to draw with and the well was deep.

There was an effective pause, and then she looked up with a mischievous smile. 'Do you know, Hughie, I've half a mind to try.'

Hugh stared at her in bewilderment, half-blinded by his sudden and unexpected bliss. 'Do you mean you'll marry me?'

Viola nodded. 'That was the idea.'

'Oh, my darling, I'm not worthy of you I know, but I'll worship you with all my heart to my life's end.' And there were tears in the brown eyes, as he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

But there were no tears in Viola's grey-green ones. She merely hoped that this first kiss wouldn't last too long, as it was such a hot morning.

When at last it was concluded, she wriggled out of Hugh's arms and settled herself again on the parapet. 'Now I want to do the thing straight,' she said, 'and not bolster you up with any false pretence. I'll marry you, if you like, as you seem to wish it, and father wishes it, and I really don't see anything against it. But if you expect me to fall in love, or any rubbish of that kind, then I'm not eligible for the situation. Now wait a minute,' as Kinfell showed signs of continuing his first embrace; 'while I have the breath to do so I want to explain, and I defy anybody to explain and be kissed at the same time: I've never been in love in my life, and I never mean to be: it's a nasty, upsetting, heating sort of thing, and I'm not taking any.' Once more Kinfell gave evidence that he considered his embrace as a serial rather than as a complete story in itself; but Viola still held him at arm's length. 'Still,' she continued, 'if you like to marry me knowing that I'm not in love with you and never shall be and shouldn't like it if I were, I'll withdraw my objections to the match.'

By that time Hugh could wait no longer and the claims of the serialised kiss became imperative. And thus a marriage was arranged between Captain Lord Kinfell, and Viola only daughter of Colonel Chalfont.

In his rooms that night Hugh fell on his knees, as he had never ceased to do since his early childhood, and in boyish fashion thanked God for having at last given him his heart's desire.

It may be that the great High Priest, Who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, pities us even more in our thanksgivings than in our supplications : for we in our blindness so often offer up humble and hearty thanks for those things, which He would fain have withheld from us, had He not first given unto us His great and terrible gift of Free-will.

CHAPTER V

‘WOODED AND MARRIED AND A’

THERE was a great stir at Eldhurst on the occasion of Viola's marriage, for surely never so beautiful a bride had been seen in all those parts. Colonel Chalfont, with a generosity that was characteristic of him, did not hesitate to run still more deeply into debt in order to provide his daughter with a trousseau worthy of herself and the occasion. And Viola amply repaid him for his efforts by doing full justice to her elegant wedding-dress : whether his creditors felt also amply repaid by this exhibition of feminine beauty is another matter, and one into which there is no necessity to enter here.

‘You are a darling old dad,’ she said to him a day or two before the wedding, as she gave a filial peck at the top of his still curly but now rapidly diminishing locks, ‘to give me such lovely clothes : and I'm sure nobody could look nicer in them than I shall.’

‘Nobody could look as nice,’ said the bridegroom elect, who was having tea in the orangery with Viola and her father.

Viola sat down at the tea-table. ‘It is very sweet of you to say so, Hughie, and I dare say you're right.’

‘Conceited minx!’ growled the Colonel in thinly disguised good humour. He was happier in his mind than he had been for months past.

Viola shook her head. ‘No, old dear, as I told you before, it isn't conceited to know the truth about oneself : it's one's duty. I forget who originally

said, "Know thyself," but I remember it was considered a frightfully nice sort of remark at the time.'

'I wonder if any of us really know ourselves,' said Kinfell: 'and whether we should enjoy the acquaintance if we did.' Though not particularly clever in what people term 'a booky way,' Hugh possessed a considerable fund of shrewd common-sense.

'Not we,' replied the Colonel.

'But if we did, we should not recognise us as ourselves,' added Viola, 'and so "no offence would be meant and none taken," as our poorer brethren say. Did I ever tell you the tale of the unlettered preacher who prayed, "Lord, give us the gift of Maccabaeus, to see ourselves as others see us"? I always think it was such an improvement on the "giftie gie us": so much more scriptural and suited to a prayer.'

Her companions laughed and agreed with her, and she went on, 'Well, what I was going to say is that if we did have the gift of Maccabaeus, we should never recognise it as such. I should remark, "A good-looking girl, but on the large size, and with atrocious manners": Father would say, "The remains of a fine man, but an awful bore": and Hughie would exclaim, "A well-set-up fellow, but heavy in hand": and we should none of us have the slightest idea that we had seen ourselves as others see us: we should merely imagine that we had come across a group of people infinitely inferior both physically and mentally to ourselves.'

The two men laughed again, but this time more ruefully: Miss Chalfont had a tongue that could cut too deeply at times.

But her doughty knight was as ever ready to take up arms on her behalf. 'No one could really possibly say you had atrocious manners, Vi.'

'Oh! couldn't they? As a matter of fact they

could, and they 'd be in the right. It was atrocious manners to say what I've just said, and you can't deny it.'

Lord Kinfell did deny it nevertheless.

Colonel Chalfont was at his very best at the time of Viola's marriage. He had never felt so good in all his life before as he did then. But it is easy for all of us to feel good when we are getting what we want: we are so anxious to reward our Maker for giving us our heart's desire. As the old woman said, 'I does my best by the Almighty, and He does His best by me.' Many of us at some time or another have echoed this sentiment, but of course in our own more refined language; or, probably, we did not even venture to put it into words at all, though the feeling was there all the time. Thus Charles Chalfont—feeling that the Almighty was doing His best by him—was prepared to do his best by the Almighty: and his best took the form of writing quite a friendly letter to Viola's grandmother, telling her of Viola's approaching nuptials. The Colonel's newly awakened conscience faintly pricked him with regard to his dealings with his late wife's relations: but he felt that this tardy recognition of their rights amply atoned for all his former deficiencies. So ready is the human heart to pardon its own shortcomings; and so apt is the human eye to minimise the beam that is lodged therein!

But although Colonel Chalfont was so eager to forgive and forget everything that he had done amiss in a long and by no means faultless career; and although old Mrs. Windybank was not far behind him in this wholesale wiping out of old scores; the redoubtable Caroline was by no means so amenable to this tardy repentance.

'So Charles has written to us at last!' she snorted, tossing her still copper-coloured head like a restive

chestnut horse. 'I suppose he wants a wedding-present from us to Viola.'

'My dear, that is nonsense,' replied her mother, with some show of reason: 'the future Lady Kinfell won't care for anything that we could afford to give her. Charles knows that whether I see her or whether I do not, dear Julia's daughter will always have a warm place in my heart; and that anything that affects her interests affects mine also, because of my love for the dear child.'

'Well, I don't feel any particular interest in a young woman whom I haven't seen for ten years or more, and it would be humbug to pretend that I do!'

Again Mrs. Windybank felt constrained to say, 'Nonsense!' (But she said it very gently.) 'You paint yourself far blacker than you are, my dear. At the bottom of your heart you cannot help feeling an interest in your own sister's own child, whether you admit it or not. After all, blood is thicker than water.'

'Mine isn't,' retorted Caroline.

Her mother smiled: 'I hardly think you would have such beautiful roses on your cheeks if it wasn't, my love.'

'Never mind my cheeks, Mother: we'll agree that they aren't as black as they are painted, whatever my heart may be. But what I say is—and I mean to stick to it—that it is no good Charles Chalfont trying to whistle us back after dropping us for all these years: because I'm not to be whistled. If Viola was too grand for us as Miss Chalfont, she'll be ten times too grand as Lady Kinfell!'

'Precisely, my dear: and that proves that what you call Charles's whistling is at any rate sincere, and shows a disposition on his part to make amends for his former neglect of us.'

Once more Miss Windybank tossed her copper-coloured head. ‘I’ve no patience, Mother, with your gentle and humble and forgiving spirit! It’s beyond everything.’

‘I may be gentle and humble and forgiving, my dear: I’m sure I hope I am: but all the same I’m sensible and reasonable, which I’m very much afraid you are not. After all, if Charles did not feel a softening of his heart towards us why did he write at all? As you yourself have pointed out, an intimacy with us would be far more unsuitable for Lady KinfeU than it has ever been for Viola Chalfont: moreover, he tells us that this young man is rich, which poor Charles himself never was, so that there is nothing to be got out of us on that score: therefore the only possible reason for Charles’s writing so nicely to us about Viola’s marriage—and he does write nicely, my dear, whatever you may say—is that he realises at last that the dear child is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and that we have the right to be interested in anything that concerns her welfare.’ Though a child of light, Mrs. Windybank was sometimes as wise in her generation as the children of this world.

Caroline poured out her mother’s second cup of tea with a firm hand, and glared sternly at the unoffending breakfast-table: she also sniffed. ‘Charles could always twist you round his little finger, Mother, simply because he was good-looking.’

‘So he was, my love, when he married poor Julia, and he was by no means young even then: but I don’t think he did much twisting, as far as I was concerned; and as you know, he twisted poor Julia the wrong way. It used to make me very unhappy that they did not get on better together: and although dear Julia was my own child, I sometimes thought she might have adapted herself to Charles a little

more than she did. It is a wife's duty to adapt herself to her husband.'

Miss Windybank put her cup down with a clatter, so incensed was she by her mother's words. 'Why is it more a wife's duty to adapt herself to her husband than it is a husband's duty to adapt himself to his wife?' she asked truculently.

'I'm sure I don't know, my dear, but it is: I suppose because women are naturally more adaptable than men, and less important in every way. You see, in married life somebody has to give way; and that somebody is nearly always the wife.'

'I'm sure I don't know why,' cried the indignant Caroline.

'Neither do I: I merely see that it is the rule, and that the exceptions to the rule don't make for happiness on either side. I've long ago ceased to ask for the why and wherefore of things: all I try is to see things as they are, and to order my life accordingly. Perhaps some day we shall be told the reason of the problems that trouble us here: but even if we are not, I don't see that it will matter very much, as long as we have learnt obedience by the things that we have suffered.'

Once more the copper-coloured head was tossed defiantly. 'I should like to see the man who would make me adapt myself to him!'

Mrs. Windybank's faded blue eyes twinkled. 'So should I, my dear: he would make you a better and a happier woman. But whether you would make him a better and a happier man is quite another question.'

Caroline laughed her ringing laugh. She always enjoyed a joke at her own expense.

'When you say you have lost your interest in Viola, because you haven't seen the child for so many years,' continued Mrs. Windybank, who—like most

amiable people—had a strong vein of gentle obstinacy in her, ‘you seem to forget that it is nearly as long since you saw Willie and Barbara; and yet you haven’t lost your interest in them.’

‘That’s different. They weren’t kept away from us because they were too grand, but because they were too far away.’

‘The reason may be different, my love, but the result is the same—or ought to be,’ persisted the adoring grandmother. ‘And, Caroline dear, don’t you think it is a little vulgar of you to keep saying that Viola is too grand for us? As I have so often tried to teach you, true gentlepeople recognise and bow to all social distinctions, but they do not lay too much stress upon them: they relegate them to their proper sphere. People are what they are: and they are only vulgar when they pretend to be something different. I recognise that the Chalfonts are superior socially to the Windybanks, and I leave it at that. You cannot imagine the upper classes squabbling over the table of precedence: then why should the middle classes do so? Let people accept their own position, and adorn it, and be proud of it, and regard it as that state of life to which it may please God to call them. If they would only recognise that He *does* call them to it, there would be an end of these modern social struggles which to my mind make life so hideous and squalid at the present day.’

Caroline laughed indulgently. ‘Really, Mother, you are frightfully behind the times!’

‘I can’t help that, my dear. I was born considerably more than sixty years ago, and am the product of my own day and generation. Younger people have their own ideas and ways which I dare say are as good as mine; but nothing will ever convince me that they are better.’

'Mine are better, but the next generation's are worse,' replied Caroline with a laugh. 'Don't you see, Mother, my generation thinks it studies the happy medium between the backwardness of its parents and the forwardness of its children : and so it was in the beginning and probably ever will be.'

'Not quite in the beginning, my dear,' remarked her mother drily : 'because then there were no parents to be accused of backwardness.'

'One for you, Mother. But I feel as soon as there were such things as parents, they began to be backward—at any rate in their children's eyes.'

'I've no doubt of it, my love. And talking of parents reminds me that I shall send dear Viola as a wedding-present the veil that I was married in. It is a beautiful piece of old lace, and belonged to my mother and grandmother before me.'

'Then why not save it for Barbara,' objected Caroline, who had always been fonder of Lucy's offspring than of Julia's.

'Because Viola is the first of that generation to be married—as her mother was in yours,' replied Mrs. Windybank, strong in the Victorian tradition that there is a sort of distinction in being the first of a family to make a venture in the holy estate. Why this should be so, it is difficult for us to imagine : but one's mothers and grandmothers lived and died in the belief, and occasionally married unsuitably on account of it.

Again Miss Windybank tossed her head, and snorted like a chestnut filly. It was not for her to admire her sister Julia's precipitancy : it was for her to be thankful that she herself had avoided it. But Mrs. Windybank could not throw off the Victorian adoration of a wedding-ring : to her it would always remain the great objective of all feminine existence.

She went on : 'Talking of Barbara, reminds me

that I am not at all happy in my mind about William : from the last two or three letters from New Zealand I gather that he is seriously out of health. Lucy does not say much ; it isn't her way to make a fuss ; but I can read between the lines that she is anxious about her husband. She says in every letter how well Willie and Barbara are : but she doesn't say much about William, and the little she does say isn't satisfactory. What do you think, Caroline ? ’

‘ I've had the same idea, too. William never was a particularly strong man, and it looks to me as if he were breaking up. I should think Willie would soon be old enough to go into partnership with his father, and look after the patients at a distance. I gather that it is the long motor rides on the bad roads that try William so.’

‘ Willie is twenty now—quite a little man,’ remarked the devoted grandmother, to whose inward eye the said Willie would always be a chubby little boy in knickerbockers : ‘ and Barbara is nineteen—a year younger than Viola.’

‘ Willie has always been Lucy's favourite,’ said Caroline : ‘ he was as a child, and I can see he is still. I never can understand a woman liking her sons better than her daughters. It's incomprehensible to me.’

‘ I'm afraid I should have done so, my dear, if I'd had a son ; so God kept me out of temptation by only giving me daughters.’

‘ And a jolly sight better for you, Mother ! If you'd had a son he'd probably have been like Father, and given everybody no end of trouble.’ Caroline was nothing if not outspoken.

‘ Don't speak disrespectfully of your dear father, Caroline : it grieves me to hear you. And, besides, sons are generally like their mothers ; so that if I'd had a son he would probably have been like me.’

‘Then he would have been a perfect angel,’ said Caroline, rising from the breakfast-table and stooping to kiss her mother on her way out of the room; ‘and much too good for this workaday world. He ’d have had to be a monk in a convent, or something of that kind.’

‘I was never what you call a monk in a convent, my dear: so why should he be, if he was like me?’

‘Because you are a woman, and that makes all the difference. I know a woman can be as good as you, because you are. But no man could do it: it isn’t in them: and a man as good as you are would be a regular freak fit for Barnum’s!’ And with her cheery laugh Caroline departed, banging the door behind her. There was nothing gentle or subdued in the movements of Miss Windybank.

The lace veil was duly sent to Eldhurst and worn by Viola at her marriage. The present chastened mood of Colonel Chalfont even went to the length of inviting Mrs. and Miss Windybank to his daughter’s wedding: but they both declined—the former because she did not feel equal to the journey, and the latter because she did not feel inclined for it.

Kinfell took a month’s leave for his honeymoon: the first half of which was spent in Paris, and the last at his English homes. His Northumbrian castle was still wrapped in brown holland, and uninhabited save by caretakers—as it had been ever since his father’s death: and he and Viola had decided that as long as he remained in the Service and so had to live where his battery was stationed, it was of no use restoring this ancestral home to life, or rendering it once more fit for human habitation. There would be time enough to do that when he retired from the Army and finally settled down: and meanwhile his agent looked well after the estates, and let the shooting to satisfactory tenants. Lord Kinfell and his bride ran down to

Northumberland for a few days at the end of their honeymoon, and stayed at the agent's house. Viola was more than ever sure that they had done the right thing in putting off their residence at the castle until a more convenient season, as she found the northern keep both dull and depressing. She could imagine that as a middle-aged woman, surrounded by a large family and a constant stream of visitors, she might find life there both peaceful and pleasant : but the prospect did not fit in with her present scheme of existence. Just now she required something far more exciting than either peace or pleasantness ; and she meant to have it : while a lonely castle, with only her husband as a companion, was a prospect too dreary to contemplate for a moment. That wasn't at all the kind of thing suitable for a young and beautiful and indifferent bride. Had she loved Kinfell, she might even have contemplated a desert island home with equanimity : but she did not love him, and that made all the difference.

But Ingleham Moat presented exactly the background that suited her. It was even beautiful enough to be in the picture with the new Lady Kinfell. An ancient house, built partly of grey stone and partly of that rose-red brick which only some tens of thousands of sunrises and sunsets can properly colour, covered with orange lichen and surrounded by a wide moat which reflected the rose and grey and golden walls, it lay asleep in a sheltered Kentish valley, like a perfect gem in an adequate setting. It had a square tower crowning the gateway which led from the drawbridge into a paved courtyard surrounded on four sides by the wings of the house. Beyond the moat lay beautiful emerald-green lawns sheltered by tall yew hedges cut into all manner of fantastic shapes : and beyond these again lay flower gardens and vegetable gardens galore. The house itself had

been built early in the fourteenth century ; renovated and restored about the same time as what S. Gregory called ' the Church of the English ' was renovated and restored ; and never touched again, except in the way of needful repairs and necessary upkeep. A fortunate thing this for Ingleham Moat, as it would have been for the ' Church of the English ' if only the Spirit of Reform had known where to stop in the case of the English Reformers as it did in the case of the owners of Ingleham Moat ! But the Spirit of Reform—like many of its fellow genii—is apt, whensoever it is let out of its bottle, not to return thereto until it has accomplished almost as much harm as good ; for which reason it is well for all men to beware lest they wantonly and unadvisedly let loose this Spirit, and then cannot control it until it has given them much more than they originally bargained for.

There were many wide and shallow oak staircases at Ingleham, since—as in many very old houses—the different parts of the house were quite separate from each other and could only be reached by crossing the courtyard : there was a large banqueting hall, with a wide fireplace large enough for the roasting of a whole ox : there were long, low, oak-panelled sitting-rooms, one of which had a secret door opening straight on to the moat, through which a dangerous or unwelcome guest could be gently but firmly pushed into the water, and tell no tales afterwards : there was a large and stately withdrawing-room, papered with a Chinese paper over two hundred years old, which as yet showed no sign of wear and tear in its brilliantly coloured birds and flowers : and there were two chapels, one old and one new, the latter dating from the time of the eighth Henry, and the former from the fourteenth century.

Such was the glorious old house which formed a fit casket for the jewel of Viola Kinfell's exceptional

loveliness. And it not only suited her outwardly : it also made a strong appeal to that inborn love of beautiful places which had first been stimulated into growth by the picturesque and ancient town of Northbridge ; and which had been further developed by the romantic surroundings of the old palace in the royal village of Eldhurst.

The historic sense is a great gift, and one which should be carefully cherished by all who are so fortunate as to possess it. In the first place it is an avenue of beauty, whereby the outer fairness of ancient buildings is vastly enhanced by the atmosphere of legend and romance which surrounds them, and which enfolds them with a glamour apprehended only by the seeing eye and the understanding heart : and, secondly, it is an avenue for that higher thing whereof outward beauty is but a symbol and a type—a veritable channel of Grace itself : for surely the souls of the righteous in their passage through this world leave their impress upon the atmosphere of those resting-places where they abide for a time ; so that they who follow in their footsteps and travel by the same way, may breathe this spiritual atmosphere impregnated by the holiness of their forerunners ; and may while still on earth be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

‘ I simply adore this place,’ remarked Lady Kin-fell to her husband and father, one Sunday when the three were sitting at luncheon in the banquet-hall of Ingleham Moat. ‘ It smiled at me and welcomed me the first time I set eyes on it ; and now that it is my home it seems to enfold me more and more.’

Kinfell beamed with delight. ‘ I am awfully glad you like it so much, Vi. Of course I do, because I lived here as a kid with Father and Mother, and I always have thought of it as my home. But I hardly

expected you to like it so much. I was afraid you might think it a bit too old-fashioned and antiquated.'

'It certainly is on the old-fashioned side,' said Colonel Chalfont, whose worn-out physique revelled in all those mundane comforts which are described by auctioneers and house-agents as 'modern requirements': picturesqueness made no appeal to him. It was the Windybank strain in Viola that gave her the historic sense.

'It's not only that I like it,' she said thoughtfully: 'it's something much more than that. Quite apart from its being the loveliest house of its kind that I've ever seen, it struck me from the very first with a sort of friendliness—the same sort of feeling one has when one meets a stranger who is also a relation: as if it had known and welcomed me ages ago, and therefore knew and welcomed me again.'

The Colonel chuckled. 'It is funny to hear you talk of relations in that way, Viola—you who have always turned your relations into strangers and treated them accordingly!'

'I don't see that,' began Kinfell who was always hot to take up arms on Viola's behalf, whether she was in the right or whether she was in the wrong, and whether he understood the point at issue or whether he did not: such minor details in nowise impaired the unswerving loyalty of his partisanship.

But his wife interrupted him in her defence. 'Yes: Father is quite right: he's scored this time: I have turned my back upon my relations and treated them as strangers. But it was only one side of me did that—the Chalfont side. The Windybank side of me has always secretly hankered after Windybanks—at least after the young ones, such as Willie and Barbara Lane.'

'Then the Chalfont side of you has always been

in the majority,’ growled the Colonel; ‘and has had its own way.’

‘Naturally; because I was always with you, and so the Chalfont side was developed at the expense of the Windybank side. But there always were the two sides, as there always must be in anybody who has two parents. I don’t see how anybody who has two absolutely different parents can help having a more or less piebald soul: and my soul is dreadfully piebald—a regular harlequin, like a Great Dane.’

‘I wonder whether the Chalfont side represents the black or the white,’ remarked the Colonel.

‘Oh! the black, of course,’ replied Viola with decision: ‘certainly the black.’

‘I’m not so sure of that,’ growled her father.

By this time Viola’s simile had percolated to her husband’s brain. ‘Though we have only two parents,’ he objected, ‘we have four grandparents and eight great-grandparents, so there must be considerably more than two sides to each of us, and many more colours than just black and white.’

‘True, O king,’ replied Viola: ‘instead of merely piebald souls we must have regular tartan ones. At least you, being partly Scottish, must have a tartan one; whilst Dad and I each have a common patchwork sort of affair, like a cottager’s bed-quilt.’

‘I think that’s a rather jolly idea,’ said Kinfell with his pleasant smile: ‘a patchwork soul made of bits taken from each of our ancestors. Scraps of velvet and satin from some, and scraps of cotton and flannel from others: some scraps greatly improving the quilt, and some nearly spoiling it. Whilst I suppose our job is to unpick the trashy bits and put odds and ends of better materials in their place.’

‘Old dear, shall I begin unpicking the Chalfont scraps, and inserting an extra bit of Windybank?’ asked Viola, laughing across the table at her father.

‘ You can please yourself, my dear. I don’t mind what you do now that you are off my hands and I have no longer the responsibility of you. As a matter of fact, in spite of all our neglect of your poor mother’s people, you are far more of a Windybank than a Chalfont. You have inherited the Windybank hair and eyes and the Windybank tongue—the former to enable you to win a man’s heart and the latter to enable you to lose it again.’

Viola’s laugh rang out like silver bells. ‘ Do you hear that, Hughie ? Will my tongue lose the heart which my hair and eyes have won for me ? ’

‘ *Rather* not ! ’ replied Kinfell, with all the afore-said heart in his eyes, little dreaming how the future would belie his words. ‘ You’ve got my heart for good and all, Vi, and nothing will ever take it away from you.’

As Lord Kinfell’s battery was still stationed at Woolwich and he was therefore obliged to reside in the neighbourhood, he and Viola had taken on Colonel Chalfont’s house at Eldhurst, leaving the latter free of all household cares, and able to divide his time between visiting his daughter and staying at various health resorts. Whenever Kinfell could get away, he and Viola motored to Ingleham, and spent their spare time in that delightful spot, twenty miles distant from Eldhurst : thereby being enabled to be in two places at once, without becoming birds, as Viola explained to her friends : ‘ in fact, to be accurate, in three places at once,’ she added ; ‘ namely Woolwich, Eldhurst, and Ingleham.’

CHAPTER VI

WHERE THE SHOE PINCHED

WHEN Viola Chalfont made up her mind to take Hugh Kinfell for better and for worse, she also made up her mind to be a good wife to him. She honestly meant to fulfil her part of the bargain. That she was not in love with him she was quite sure : but she intended to be as good a wife as if she were : which intention was really a very excellent one, though of the kind wherewith the road to Hell is paved. Like most spinsters—and especially like most young spinsters—Viola regarded marriage as a recreation rather than as a profession : and was as much astonished as are most married women to discover that it is not only a profession but sometimes a very arduous profession, requiring a course of training and preparation which is by common consent universally withheld. A woman cannot become a schoolmistress or a sick-nurse or an actress or a singer without a long course of training : yet she is expected to become a wife and a mother—far more important professions than all the others put together—without any training at all. Civilised parents teach their daughters to be good wives very much as savage parents teach their children to be good swimmers—by throwing them straight into deep water, and leaving it to their natural instincts to sink or swim as the case may be.

Therefore when Viola Kinfell made up her mind that she would be an exemplary wife to her new husband, she reckoned without her host. She omitted

to take into consideration either her own modern independence of thought, or the difficulty of living pleasantly with a person whose standpoint is almost invariably the opposite of one's own. The wise man asked, 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' And only an unwise woman would dare, as Viola dared, to answer that question in the affirmative. The task she had set herself was beyond her powers: and gradually she came to realise this.

Kinfell was not to blame, his wife was not to blame; it really was their misfortune rather than their fault: but the fact remained that their respective points of view were so diametrically opposed to one another that any unity of thought or agreement of outlook seemed increasingly impossible. It was not only that they held different opinions upon almost every subject under the sun: that may be an obstacle to wedded happiness, but it is not an insuperable one. Their difficulty lay far deeper than this. They not only formed different opinions when regarding a question—which difficulty might be met by the one suppressing his or her opinion, or, better still, by the one converting the other: they approached the question from absolutely opposite sides—in which case what common agreement was possible?

For instance, Viola went in for general effects with regard to the art of life, while Hugh had an eye for the minutest details. To her mind the end always justified the means: to his, the means assumed greater proportions than the end itself. Half his time he was being nearly choked by his unsuccessful straining at gnats; while she was capable of swallowing camels wholesale, without turning a hair either of herself or of them.

And the tragedy of it was that they were both anxious adequately to fulfil the rôle assigned to them in the drama of matrimony: they had carefully

studied their parts beforehand, and believed that they were word-perfect ; and it was only when the curtain had been rung up and the play begun, that they discovered that the parts allotted to them were utterly beyond their abilities.

But while neither of them was to be blamed, both of them were to be pitied : Hugh, because he loved to distraction a woman who obviously did not return his love, and who laughed at his ideals and trampled upon his sacred shrines : and Viola, because she was burdened with a husband who bored her to death : and yet one whom a different sort of woman might have loved devotedly. In their excuse it may be urged that Hugh certainly had more shrines and sacred places than is either necessary or convenient in an ordinary dwelling-house, so that Viola could hardly move without knocking against one or other of his cherished ideals : while Viola was what North-country people call so ‘ quick at the uptake,’ that it required a fifty-horse-power brain to keep up with her at all. There it was : and they were married to each other : and to make the marriage a success was as impossible as to undo it.

In the first spring of their married life, Hugh suggested that it might be a pleasure to his wife to invite her aunt and grandmother to visit her. It was exactly what he would have desired had he been she ; and he—unwisely as it happened in this particular instance—obeyed the Golden Rule : a rule which, so life’s experience teaches us, is often more honoured in the breach than in the observance. To care for people, and to consider them as we would have them care for and consider us, is an attitude of mind in harmony with the Divine : but in a particular instance to do exactly to them as we should like them to do to us, is nine times out of ten an egregious mistake and an occasion of offence : as unless they become exactly

as we are, they will not enjoy being treated exactly as we enjoy being treated—in fact will probably be mortally offended at it.

But Lord Kinfell was still under thirty, and had only been married a few months : so the wisdom of the ages was not yet his.

‘ Good gracious, Hughie, what an awful idea ! ’ exclaimed his wife. ‘ Whatever use should I have for an aunt or a grandmother ? They weren’t included in my furnishing estimate, and I’ve no place for them either here or at Ingleham. ’

‘ But they are your own people, ’ argued Kinfell, to whom the tie of blood was sacred and indissoluble.

‘ Of course they are : who ever heard of aunts and grandmothers that weren’t relations ? ’

Hugh’s face assumed the bewildered, half-dazed expression that it always wore when Viola snapped him up too quickly. ‘ Oh ! I didn’t mean that. I only meant that as they are relations I thought you’d like to have them here for a bit. ’

‘ Then you thought wrong, as my nurse used to say when I was a child. I always consider that aged relations are an acquired taste ; and it is one that I have no intention of acquiring. ’

Hugh floundered on. ‘ But won’t they think it queer of you not to invite them, now that you have a house of your own ? I mean won’t they think it unkind ? ’

Viola shrugged her shoulders. ‘ I don’t care what they think. Why should I ? ’

‘ But *I* care. I can’t bear people to think you are unkind, Vi. ’

‘ Well, I often am, so why shouldn’t they ? In fact if they are people with any power of perception I don’t see how they can help it. All which preamble of course means that you want to invite your people to stay with us : but I can’t imagine why you don’t

say so straight out without all this humming and hawing and beating about the bush.'

Hugh had not meant this at all. He honestly wanted Viola to invite her relations, as he considered such a course her duty as well as her delight. But he could not explain this to her. She was so sharp with him, that he felt it was hopeless to set himself right in her eyes; and very early in his married life he ceased trying to do so. This was a mistake on his part. If he had only stood up to her—if he had made her listen while he endeavoured to set forth his own point of view—they might have come to some understanding of each other. But he was too shy—and also too proud—to put his disappointment and his longing and his misery into words: and she was too quick and too impatient and too imperious to search diligently for anything that lay below the surface. She would have listened while he described those feelings of his which she so ruthlessly lacerated; nay, more, she would have enjoyed sitting by and assisting her husband while he vivisected his heart for their mutual edification. But this dumb, hurt misery of his made no appeal to her; in her own lingo, she 'had no use for it': she classified it under the generic term of 'sulks,' and threw it aside on the rubbish-heap of wasted emotions.

And all the time the poor girl was terribly bored. To the careless ear boredom sounds a somewhat light and trivial affliction, but as a matter of fact it is responsible for half the misery, two-thirds of the illness, and three-quarters of the suicides in the world. It is called by all sorts of high-sounding names, such as Blighted Affection, Despair, Neurasthenia, Incompatibility of Temper, and the like: sometimes even Higher Thought and Uric Acid: but it is really our old friend Boredom all the time, dressed up in different disguises. It is when people are bored that they have

recourse to old diseases and to new religions : they must have something—poor things !—to occupy their souls and their bodies : and when they cannot, or will not, get the right something, they are very apt to get the wrong.

With a truer intuition than her husband, Lady Kinfell perceived that in order to obey the Golden Rule in the spirit one must often disobey it in the letter ; otherwise it would not be a Golden Rule at all : so, with real good-nature, she deftly turned the tables, and offered to her husband the ‘one man’s meat’ which happened to be ‘another man’s (or, to be more correct, another woman’s) poison’ ; and suggested to give him the treat which he had so unwisely prescribed for her : that is to say she invited his cousins, Flora and Janet Farquhar, to come and stay for a fortnight with her and Hugh, partly at Eldhurst and partly at Ingleham. To Hugh’s unfeigned delight, the invitation was promptly accepted : but the country-bred girls so much preferred Ingleham to Eldhurst, that the Eldhurst part of the visit dwindled to a very small fraction indeed.

It really was kind of Viola to invite the two Miss Farquhars, as she and they had nothing in common, and they were by no means lively companions : and she did it solely to please her husband, which ought to be counted to her for righteousness. Yet all he said was, ‘I am awfully glad the girls are here, and we must get them to stay on an extra week : as they are such nice company for you while I am obliged to be at Woolwich.’ Which—as Viola remarked to herself—was exactly what he would say. Even Love can be very stupid at times.

That ‘extra week’—making three weeks in all—was the last straw as far as Lady Kinfell’s powers of endurance were concerned : especially as Hugh—in a laudable but perverted desire to augment as far

as possible his wife's pleasure in the ' nice company ' provided for her—spent as much of that week as he could manage, either at Ingleham itself, or motoring between there and his headquarters.

There is no doubt that when Lord Kinfell and his Scottish cousins were together, the intellectual atmosphere thereby produced what Viola called ' a mental fug ' : and it did not suit her. Unlike her father—and like her dead mother and her mother's mother—she had a psychic vein in her nature which rendered her highly susceptible to mental atmosphere. It was that which made Boredom so unutterably oppressive to her ; just as it was that which had really killed poor Julia Chalfont after she fully realised that the man who had married her solely for her beauty had grown tired of both it and her.

There is something very strange and interesting in the study of mental atmosphere. We are all of us creating it around us. And not only around us ; we leave it behind us in the houses that we have inhabited. Therefore it behoves us to be careful to dwell in those houses made with hands, which have sheltered the children of light and not the children of darkness. It may be that those whose thoughts and ways are evil, so impregnate the mental atmosphere of the places where they live and move and have their being, that those who come after them catch the moral infection : just as those saintly souls who live always in the Divine Light may fill their earthly homes with a spiritual fragrance which clings to all who dwell where they have dwelt.

But there are many varieties of good mental atmospheres, just as there are many varieties of evil ones : and the one created by Hugh and his cousins—though admirable in itself—was most uncongenial to Viola. It was too bracing, too bleak, for her easy-going, pleasure-loving nature. Had she been brought up

in it, she would probably have adapted herself to it unconsciously, and have thrived in it: but the *laissez-faire* education, given to her by her father, rendered anything in the shape of authority or discipline utterly repellent to her. In these days Viola often thought of poor Mary Stuart, transplanted from the sunshine and frivolity of France to the harsh climate and stern teaching of the Scotland of the Reformation; and entered into the sufferings of that beautiful and unfortunate queen: for it was what she called 'the John Knox touch' in Hugh and his cousins that she could not stand at any price.

It took about six months of married life to open the eyes of Lord and Lady Kinfell to the apparently impassable gulf that lay between them; a chasm which merely bored and irritated Viola, but which wellnigh broke Hugh's tender heart. To be perfectly candid, Viola was not disappointed in her husband: she had always known she would find him dull, and dull he was; while his rank and wealth remained solid advantages, which pleased her even more than she had expected them to do. Her only disappointment was disappointment in herself that she had been unable to play the rôle of excellent wife as perfectly as she had thought she could: but—like the rest of us—she found ample excuses for the delinquent when the delinquent happened to be herself; and she left it at that. She had never loved her husband, so naturally she could not leave off loving him, nor even love him less; therefore her heart suffered not at all. When Hugh was present, she found him a nuisance, but made the best of him for the sake of all that he had given her: and when he was not present, she forgot all about him.

It was a lovely spring day during the last week of the Misses Farquhar's visit, and Lady Kinfell had—as old-fashioned people used to say—'got out

of bed the wrong side.' Nothing was right, as far as she was concerned ; not even the beautiful weather. In fact it is possible that the beautiful weather was to a certain extent responsible for this wrong-sidedness. There is something in the air of a perfect spring day which makes us all long for some better thing than we have as yet experienced ; something which calls to the very best and highest in our natures, and half-awakens our dormant instinct for perfection. Now Viola—though she was utterly unaware of it—had potentialities in her nature that her inadequate education had never aroused : and one of these potentialities was the power to love intensely : but this power was so buried under layers of selfishness and frivolity that its existence was unsuspected even by Viola herself. Therefore the magic of spring, which calls to the best in every one of us, called to this latent power hidden in the soul of Viola Kinfell ; with the result that, for the time being, the worldly advantages of her marriage ceased to satisfy her ; and her subconscious self cried out for the ideal lover that every woman has the right to claim—the lover who not only loves her, but whom she can love in return. It is in loving that we find our highest happiness and the truest expression of our natures ; not in being loved.

So Viola was in a bad temper on that lovely spring morning ; and the brilliance of the sunshine made the wits of her husband and his cousins seem all the duller by contrast. It was Sunday, too : and Viola was not altogether keen on Sundays—especially as interpreted by her cousins-in-law, who always spoke of the first day of the week as ' the Sabbath.'

Ingleham Moat was a considerable distance from a church ; so Lord Kinfell arranged that a curate from the neighbouring town of Sevenash should come over every Sunday morning and hold a service in the

‘new’ chapel which had been built in the time of Henry the Eighth : and the villagers were invited to attend this service. The Misses Farquhar did not altogether approve of this arrangement. In the first place it was not what they had been accustomed to, which in itself was enough to condemn anything in their eyes : and, in the second, a private chapel seemed to them to savour of what they were pleased to call Popery, and they looked askance at it accordingly.

Viola was looking specially lovely that morning as she sat at the breakfast-table in a white cloth coat and skirt and a soft lace blouse : but even her own beauty did not succeed in restoring her good humour ; it merely accentuated her claim to a prize in the lottery of love, and added to her dissatisfaction with the blank she had drawn.

‘Are you going to have the morning service here to-day ?’ asked Flora Farquhar. She made this inquiry every Sunday morning, in order to accentuate the arrangement of which she disapproved, and to give herself the opportunity of disapproving of it afresh.

‘Of course,’ replied her host. ‘We have it here every Sunday morning.’ Hugh was one of those patient people who do not mind giving the same information over and over again.

‘And how do you get a clergyman to take it ?’ This was another effort on Flora’s part to put a known evil into words ; as an evil when put into words is so much more easy to condemn.

Before Hugh had time to reply, his wife interrupted him. ‘We send the car over to Sevenash for a curate. You know that perfectly well, Flora. You’ve asked the same question every Sunday since you came, and have had the same answer : and I should have thought that before the third time of asking

even a Scottish mind would have assimilated the information.'

Here Janet put in her oar. 'Do you think it right to have the car out on Sunday, Hugh?'

Again Viola answered for her slower-witted husband. 'Of course he does, or else he wouldn't do it. Did you ever know Hugh do anything that he didn't think right?'

Janet carefully considered this point: then she cautiously replied, 'Perhaps not: though I couldn't say absolutely off-hand. Still I will admit that I don't think Hugh often does what he knows to be wrong. Though, all the same, I don't know that my conscience would allow me to take out a car on the Sabbath.'

Viola shrugged her pretty shoulders. 'Well, as it isn't either your car or your conscience I don't see that that matters. Surely Hugh's conscience and Hugh's cars are his own to do what he likes with.'

'Oh no, Viola,' objected Janet: 'one's conscience is never one's own to do what one likes with. We ought to obey our consciences; not to let our consciences obey us.'

'Besides,' argued Kinfell, 'if I didn't send a car to Sevenash for a curate, we should have to go in the car ourselves to service at Restham; and that would mean having the big car out instead of only the run-about. Then there are the village people to consider also. They are so far from a church that I don't think the majority of them went anywhere until I started having service in the chapel here. Three miles there and three miles back is a long way for people to walk—and especially people who have been working hard all the week.'

'So,' added Viola, 'as Mahomet cannot go to the mountain, there being so many Mahomets and none of them except ourselves having cars, Hugh thinks

it better to bring the mountain to Mahomet ; especially as the mountain can be conveyed in the little run-about.'

Flora pursed up her lips. 'Of course people must do their own way ; but for my part it always seems more scriptural to go to church than to have the church come to you. At any rate it is what we have always been accustomed to.'

'But that doesn't make it right,' persisted Lady Kinfell, who was in an argumentative mood : 'being accustomed to a thing doesn't make it the right thing.'

Miss Farquhar however thought it did ; and said so.

'If I remember correctly,' said Janet, 'you have misquoted the proverb about Mahomet and the mountain, Viola : what you meant was that as the mountain couldn't come to Mahomet, Mahomet had to go to the mountain. That is how I have always heard it put.'

Viola laughed. 'No ; I meant what I said. Hugh is Mahomet and the church is the mountain. And as Hugh finds it impossible—that is to say, Hugh *plus* all the servants and the villagers finds it impossible—to go to church, he thoughtfully arranges for the church to come to him. It's quite simple.'

But Janet was not so easily silenced. 'Hugh doesn't arrange for the church to come to him ; he arranges for the curate to come to him, which is quite a different thing. A church itself couldn't come to anybody, any more than a mountain could : and the whole point of the proverb, as I have heard it, is that it was because the mountain couldn't come to him that Mahomet had to go to it. Mountains can't move, you know.'

Lady Kinfell merely remarked under her breath, 'O Caledonia ! stern and wild,' a reply of which

Miss Janet Farquhar utterly failed to see the point. So the latter felt she had convinced her opponent, and left it at that, devoting herself meanwhile to her eggs and bacon.

After breakfast, Viola wandered into the garden ; and because he loved her, and because it was spring, and because the sun was shining, Hugh followed her with adoration in his faithful brown eyes. He had learnt by now, poor soul ! not to trouble his wife often with signs of affection : she had made it so clear to him how they bored her : but on this spring morning his feelings were too strong to be altogether suppressed, so he stole after her down the walk beside the yew hedge, and—before she was aware of him—had put his arms round her and kissed her.

Lady Kinfell started as if she had been stung—or as if some other than Lord Kinfell had taken such a liberty with her.

‘Oh ! Hughie, how can you be so vulgar ?’ she exclaimed, rubbing off his kiss with her hand, as children do.

‘I don’t see any vulgarity in a man’s kissing his own wife.’

‘Yes there is—if it ’s done out of doors. I always think open-air embraces are most frightfully vulgar. To my mind, kissing is not an *al fresco* entertainment at all ; and to do it in the garden on a Sunday morning is like playing cards by daylight.’

‘Still, my darling, most people nowadays do play Bridge by daylight,’ argued Hugh, with some show of reason.

‘I know they do, but *I* don’t : I think it a most awfully stuffy habit to fug over a card-table when you might be out of doors. And going about kissing all over the place on a Sunday morning is quite as stuffy—in fact it is worse, as it is Sabbath-breaking as well.’

‘I didn’t go kissing about all over the place, as you call it. I only kissed my own wife.’

Viola shook her head. ‘Another stuffy habit—frightfully stuffy! I’ll tell you what it is, Hugh; being with Flora and Janet is making you most horribly stodgy. There was always a certain amount of stodge dormant in your nature—and unfortunately not too dormant at times—but I succeeded in keeping it in check. But being with one’s own family always rubs up the family traits; and I’ve noticed that the sisters Farquhar have rendered your stodginess positively rampant. It was always there; but now it’s here and everywhere, and there’s no getting away from it.’

‘Then do you want to get away from it, Viola?’ The misery in Kinfell’s face was so obvious that he who ran could read; and Lady Kinfell was not running, and had sharper eyes than most people. But though she saw it plainly enough, it did not soften her heart towards her husband: in fact it rather served to harden it still further, as there is no mood less susceptible to a softening influence than irritation. And Lady Kinfell was irritated against everybody and everything that spring morning.

Hugh turned away and walked slowly back to the house, his heart heavy within him. He had taken the staff called Beauty for his guide on life’s journey, and it had broken in his hand and pierced him. His misery was probably his own fault, but it hurt none the less on that account. He was not the first man who has found that particular staff a broken reed; nor will he be the last.

Viola attended matins in the private chapel in company with her family, her household, and a selection of villagers, rebellion seething in her heart the whole time. She was at cross purposes with the entire scheme of creation that morning. The sermon

however interested her. It was on the subject of the war for ever going on in the human heart between man's higher and his lower nature; between the spiritual and the material. And it is not only a war between the two single Powers of Good and Evil, the preacher pointed out: it is a war among Allied Forces, which are neither wholly good nor wholly bad, and which change about from one side to the other.

The idea pleased Viola's fancy and she took up the subject again at luncheon, for which the curate always stayed when, as the servants said, 'the Family were at home.'

'I liked your idea of there being so many people inside us, Mr. Pearmain,' she remarked: 'it is so much more exciting than the old-fashioned notion that we have only two sides—a good one and a bad one—and that those two are always at loggerheads. It is much more fun to think of whole battalions of selves fighting it out together. A battle is much more thrilling than a duel: and studies in black and white aren't half so attractive as coloured pictures.'

The curate blushed and crumbled his bread in his excitement at being commended by the beautiful Lady Kinfell, for whom he cherished an abounding admiration.

'I am so glad you agree with me, Lady Kinfell,' he replied. 'It has always seemed to me that there are a great many selves in every one of us. Personally I think the Good and the Evil are outside us altogether: a guardian angel and a bad angel, who are for ever fighting over those many selves and endeavouring to corner them. And it is our duty to see that the good angel gets the majority. But I don't think that anybody has a pure white self or an all black self—at any rate not in this life.'

'I don't like the idea of people having several selves,' said the elder Miss Farquhar solemnly : 'and I am surprised that you do, Mr. Pearmain.'

'I didn't say that I liked it, Miss Farquhar : I only said I thought it was so. What we like has nothing to do with the matter. Facts are by no means always regulated by fancies.'

'And the idea of these being of different colours seems to me absurd,' added Janet : 'how can there be any colour in things you can't see ?'

'I don't know how there can be, but there is,' the curate replied. 'To some minds almost every thought presents itself as a colour. "Colour concepts" is, I believe, the proper term for these.'

'And it certainly applies to one's different selves,' said Viola, who always enjoyed a conversation of this kind which was to Kinfell a stumbling-block, and to the Farquhars foolishness. 'I have at least seven selves, and I know them by their colours.'

'May we hear what those colours are ?' asked Mr. Pearmain, quite ready to believe that the inner Lady Kinfell was as beautifully tinted as the outer one.

'Yes ; tell us about them, Vi,' urged Hugh, who, though he could not understand, could love, like the lady in *In Memoriam*.

Nothing loth, Viola complied, being always ready and interested to talk about her charming self. 'Well, there's my showy society self, and that is yellow : and there's my jolly everyday self, which is purple : and there's a sort of pagan self, that revels in Nature and in all physical pleasures, and that is green : and there's myself when I'm depressed and out of sorts, and that is a hideous greyish drab : and there's my worst self—a rebellious, bad-tempered, impatient person—who is red : and there's my very best self of all, which is blue. So you see you are quite right, Mr. Pearmain : there's neither a black

nor a white self in the whole collection. It never struck me before, but there isn't.'

Mr. Pearmain was delighted at meeting so sympathetic a mind in so perfect a body—as indeed what man would not be? 'Quite so, quite so, Lady Kinfell. I see them all in my mind's eye——'

'Like pretty maids all in a row,' Viola interrupted.

The curate laughed. 'Exactly. And of course though they keep to their own colours, they vary in shade from time to time. I mean that when you are specially brilliant, the yellow almost becomes orange : and when you are extra well and exuberant, the green changes from grass-green to emerald.'

'Yes : and when I am extra good the blue goes from turquoise to deep sapphire : and when I am extra bad the red turns positively lurid.'

'But I don't agree about the jolly, comfy, everyday self being purple,' said Pearmain, following his hostess's mood : 'purple always seems to me to be a stately sort of colour, like imperial Rome, don't you know ?'

Viola shook her head, 'Not my purple. My purple is what my old nurse used to call 'puce'—an old-fashioned, cosy kind of colour, that old ladies trimmed their caps with. Not the colour of imperial Rome at all, but of dear old ladies' bonnet-strings.'

'I can't understand it at all,' commented Janet : 'to me it seems that if you are green you are seasick, and if you are yellow your liver must be terribly out of order, and if you are purple you must be apoplectic.'

Viola groaned inwardly : and catching young Pearmain's eye she knew that he echoed her groan.

'I'm afraid I don't quite understand,' said Lord Kinfell.

'Of course you don't,' said Viola to herself : 'you never do.' But she gave him no credit for his unsuccessful efforts to do so. If a visiting curate could

understand her remarks, why couldn't her own wedded husband do so ? she asked herself : and after all she had a certain amount of justice on her side. But she had no mercy when she replied, ' My dear Hughie, as Dr. Johnson said, I can give you information, but I cannot supply you with brains to understand it.'

Hugh winced. A snub from his own wife at his own table is not palatable to any man worthy of the name. Still—being in his way a great gentleman—he patiently endeavoured to explain himself. ' I mean that you once said to your father in my presence that you had a black-and-white piebald soul—like a harlequin Great Dane, I remember you said it was : and now you say you are all the colours *except* black-and-white. I don't see quite how to reconcile the two.'

Lady Kinfell went as near to snorting as a well-behaved English peeress could : if she had been her Aunt Caroline she would have snorted outright. Therefore, though she did not know it, she looked very like Miss Windybank at that moment. ' Good gracious, Hughie, do you mean to say you remember everything I ever say ? '

' I believe I do,' replied Kinfell, truthful as usual.

' Then Heaven help me—that 's all that I can say ! Fancy living with a man who makes a note of one's every idle word ! I must say your memory outruns your sense of proportion, Hugh.'

' Well, I call it a great compliment for a man to remember everything a woman says,' remarked Flora.

' You would,' retorted Viola rudely.

' I should like a man to remember everything that I said—I should like it very much indeed,' continued the elder Miss Farquhar.

' I'm afraid you won't get what you like then :

I should doubt if even Hugh's memory would undertake that strain,' replied Viola more rudely still.

But Flora took it all in good part. 'Anyhow it wouldn't be such a strain as remembering all that you say, Viola : for I don't talk a quarter as much as you do.'

'Perhaps not ; but everything you say is less to the point. If a man has got to remember everything that a woman says, I don't think he could find a better woman for the job than me. Everything I say is worth remembering. As some clever man or other said of Lady Elisabeth something, "To know and love me is a liberal education." '

'But not always an easy one,' muttered Kinfell under his breath.

After lunch was over, the curate was sent back to Sevenash in the little car : and Viola rushed out with her two dogs for a long tramp in the lanes, feeling that she must escape from the mental atmosphere of Ingleham or suffocate. And as she tramped along, she wondered why her husband was so intensely irritating to her, and whether he could help it. 'Every thing he does tries me almost past bearing,' she said to herself ; 'even the way he blows his nose : yet I can hardly blame him for that, because if he didn't blow it I should find him more trying still. I can't think what it is that is the matter with him and me. I wonder if other married people feel the same. If they do, I can quite see why there isn't any marrying or giving in marriage in heaven. It would entirely spoil the whole character of the place. We are young and we are well-off and we are strong and we are good-looking : at least I am—quite good-looking enough for two : and there's nothing really to write home about. But all the time Hughie makes life so unbearable to me that I sometimes feel I'd rather die than put up with him any longer : and I should very

much dislike to die ! So I must make up my mind to put the money and the title and all the nice things into one scale, and Hughie in the other, and trust to my luck that he won't be so heavy that he 'll weigh them all down ; though really he is almost heavy enough for anything ! '

And so the poor, unhappy child rambled on, not knowing that what was the matter with her was simply and solely that she was bored to death, because she was not in love with her husband. If only she had loved him she would not have been bored at all, for love is the best antidote to boredom.

CHAPTER VII

MARRIED LIFE

MEN and women may be classified in many ways : yet when the scientific professor has tabulated his classes, he may sometimes be puzzled as to the category in which some individual man or woman should be placed. But there is one classification as to which it is difficult to make an error. Men are blessed—or cursed—with the gift of introspection, or they are not. Some men, and many women, are always examining their feelings, uprooting their emotions to see how they are growing, carefully considering the effect they produce on other people or the effect other people produce on them. The rest of the world, probably the majority, never dream of indulging in this luxury—and thereby escape much pleasurable misery.

Now there is no doubt that Hugh Kinfell was one of those to whom the very name of introspection had no meaning. Honest, well-intentioned, not over clever, he had his standards of right and wrong, the standards of the very best type of English gentleman educated at a Public School and a University. He did not even know that he had standards. If he saw what seemed to him the right thing to do, he did it. He did not ask himself why he did it : he did not consider whether it was to his advantage or to his disadvantage : he did not weigh *pros* and *cons* : he did not argue with himself as to whether the end did or did not justify the means.

There were no fine distinctions, no hair-splitting differences, for Hugh Kinfell. To him black was black, and white was white : he was not one of those who could argue himself into the comfortable belief that each was grey.

Yet even to one who is not by nature prone to introspection, a time may come when he may find himself wondering whether he has not made a profound mistake. And such a doubt came easily to a man who was so diffident as to his powers as was Kinfell.

Although he had resolutely tried to close his eyes to patent facts, he could no longer conceal from himself that all was not well with him and his wife : but that was as far as he went. All he knew was that he was unhappy, and he suspected that Viola was unhappy, and he knew not why. He set himself in his dogged way to find out what was wrong and how it could be put right again.

As he smoked his pipe, endeavouring to think the matter out—and anything in the nature of thinking was wonderfully difficult to Hugh—no doubt arose, at any rate at first, in his mind as to which of the twain was to blame. Of course the fault lay in him alone : he could not admit for a moment any flaw in his beloved and beautiful wife. What puzzled him was to discover where he had failed as a husband. If the old proverb, ‘Marry in haste and repent at leisure,’ crossed his mind, it was only to be contemptuously dismissed. For, so he argued with himself, he had not married in haste. Had he not worshipped at the shrine for weeks before he dared to put it to the touch ? And now, having won it all, he seemed in a fair way to lose it. Nor did he repent. Though Viola had always said she did not love him, he did not believe her : though she laughed at him for his slowness of apprehension,

though she derided his most cherished beliefs, though she rode roughshod over the conventions of his class which were a part of his very being, he still loved her—loved her better, so he told himself, than his own soul. What he did not know was that it was her beauty only that he loved. Of the higher form of love, of the sweet companionship, of the community of interests, of the mutual understanding—and sometimes misunderstanding, of the taking sweet counsel together, he knew nothing. His marriage was not the marriage of true minds. His love was a love that might conceivably alter when it alteration found. He had taken to himself the staff called Beauty, and was horrified beyond measure to find it but a broken reed which pierced his hand. Of that other staff called Bands—the staff of comradeship and companionship and complete unity of mind and soul—he had not so much as heard. That was to be revealed to him later, when he was ripe to receive and assimilate the knowledge. Wherefore it is not to be wondered at that he was unable to discover what was amiss in his relations with his wife, or to find a remedy for the state of affairs which day by day was becoming intolerable.

Perhaps—he argued with himself—he and Viola were not adapted to matrimony; married life was not an easy life to them. But he did not know that no life is really an easy one to those who adequately fulfil its conditions; and that those people who find it easy are not living it properly.

If Kinfell had stood up to Viola, when she was more than usually aggravating, and let her clearly know that he would stand no nonsense, things might have been better. Women love a strong man; not merely a man who is physically strong, but a man who can, and who does, rule: and there were qualities in Hugh that must have compelled his wife's love if

only he had known how to use them to his own advantage.

But, alas for Hugh! Instead of standing up for himself, he allowed his wife to trample upon him. When smitten on the one cheek he meekly offered the other. When he expressed an opinion on some subject or other, only to meet with open derision on the part of his wife, he never argued the point. He did not withdraw his opinion: he simply retired into his shell and held his tongue. This naturally irritated Viola. For a woman never objects to an argument; it adds a zest to life. She does not mind if the man is wrong; she does not even mind if he is right, provided he will clothe his righteousness in words. What a woman cannot stand is for a man to hold his tongue.

With much painful travail Kinfell passed in review the last few months, asking himself what more he could have done to please his wife, how he could have acted differently, in what way he could have been more indulgent. With all his want of confidence in himself and in his judgment, he could discover nothing. Viola had everything, so far as material things go, that a woman could desire. She had but to express a wish and it was gratified: indeed Hugh tried to anticipate her wishes. But herein, although he knew it not, he made many a mistake. In his ignorance, he assumed that what he himself liked, his wife liked. This could soon have been cured: but worse than this, he assumed that what the women with whom he had been brought up liked, his wife would like. This was a fatal error—an error into which most young married people are prone to fall. Every family has its own traditions, its own peculiarities, its own idiosyncrasies; and a man makes a fatal blunder if he imagines because his own sisters, cousins, and aunts think or like this, that, or the other, that therefore his wife will think or like the same. Hence

the failure of Hugh's well-meant proposal that Viola should ask her grandmother and aunt to come for a visit : hence the failure of the actual visit of Flora and Janet.

For it was a failure, and so Hugh came to acknowledge, though the discovery, like retribution, came with a lagging foot. But though the failure was patent, the cause of the failure was hidden from his eyes. When at last he saw that everything his cousins did, everything his cousins said, irritated his wife, his honest head was puzzled as to the reason. What queer things women were ! What on earth did it matter if Flora asked every Sunday whether there was to be service in the private chapel ?—or if Janet expressed a doubt as to whether the use of the car on Sunday could be reconciled with orthodox Sabbatarian principles ? Why worry over such trifles ? Of course Flora and Janet had been brought up after the strictest sect of the Presbyterians. Why could not Viola remember that, and leave the matter alone ?

Then all that ridiculous nonsense about colours, over which Viola and the curate had made such a fuss. It was very silly, no doubt : but if it pleased them, well and good. He had no objection. But why should Viola be so irritated because he was a Gallio in such matters. Not that Hugh expressed himself in these terms. He had forgotten there was such a person as Gallio : or, if he remembered Gallio at all, he mixed him up with Gamaliel.

It must be confessed that Kinfell had a show of reason in these communings. The pity of it was that he kept these thoughts to himself. If he had gone frankly to Viola, and had talked the matter out with her, there was a possibility of a better understanding between them. But if he had so done, he would not have been Hugh Kinfell. His wife was a thing apart,

not to be found fault with even by her husband. Still less was she to be criticised either by or to others. There are some husbands, and more wives, who delight in discussing the virtues and still more the failings of their spouses, with their own people, or with some familiar friend : in extolling *his* marvellous wisdom or *her* exquisite tact ; or more frequently, in deploring *his* taciturnity, and *her* unfortunate temper, *his* lamentable habit of going to the club, or *her* indifference to the quality of food. When this is the case, great is the joy of the in-laws : nothing could be more congenial to their ideas. But Kinfell was not one of these, to the great astonishment and bewilderment of his excellent cousins.

One Saturday afternoon, Hugh had motored back in his run-about from Woolwich in time for tea. He had been expected to bring back with him one of his brother officers to spend the week-end at the Moat. Unfortunately his friend had found it impossible to get away.

‘What have you done with Captain Bateson ?’ asked Viola, as Hugh strolled into the drawing-room alone : ‘has he gone straight to his room ?’

‘He hasn’t come,’ replied Hugh : ‘couldn’t get off.’

‘Why on earth not ?’ cried Viola.

‘On duty,’ replied Hugh : ‘the Major wouldn’t give him leave.’

Viola was not a little put out by this news. She had looked forward to the advent of a pleasant visitor, who would have mitigated the deadly dullness of what Janet called the Sabbath. Her disappointment was perhaps pardonable : what was not pardonable was her loss of temper, and the diatribes she directed against not only the commanding officer, who was indeed responsible, but also against the unfortunate and unoffending Bateson, and her equally unoffending and more unfortunate husband.

Hugh shrugged his shoulders, and drank his tea and munched his cakes with philosophic calm : but Janet and Flora took up the cudgels on his behalf—a well-meaning but tactless proceeding which only added to Viola's unreasonable irritation.

After tea Hugh strolled into the garden for a quiet pipe : and was not particularly well pleased when Janet followed him, leaving Viola and Flora to bore one another to extinction. It was a curious fact that although formerly he used to get on well enough with his cousins (whom he liked more from old associations, and for that strongest of bonds, an offensive and defensive alliance against their natural enemy, Sir Stuart, than for anything else), he now found it very hard to put up with them. It was partly that, with his departure to Oxford, the girls had ceased to be rebellious to the powers that be, and had become more or less as narrow and strict as their respected father. But it was more than this : Hugh resented not a little their attitude towards his wife, their constant criticism of the mode of life at Ingleham Moat, their hardly veiled dislike of its mistress. It was all right for himself to wonder why Viola troubled herself about these matters : he might well have said to himself : 'Physician, heal thyself'—for he was as touchy as possible where his wife was concerned. However, he could hardly tell Janet that he preferred solitude and a pipe to her charming society. So with the best grace at his command he pocketed his pipe, and lighting a cigarette waited for his cousin.

'What have you been doing to-day ?' he asked : 'been out in the car, or had a round of golf ?'

'No, we haven't played golf. We should have liked a round, but Viola preferred to go to town. So we motored up and lunched at the Ritz, and she did some shopping. She bought some hats and things : most unnecessary to my thinking. She has already

more than she can possibly require. *Most* extravagant, I call it !’

‘I don’t see why the poor girl shouldn’t buy a new hat, if she fancies one,’ said Hugh, on his defence at once : ‘I never knew *you* to object to having a new hat or frock in the old days.’

‘Perhaps that is so. But you must remember that *my* dress allowance is small enough. And I have been always taught that extravagance is a sin.’

‘You weren’t always so keen on discovering things to be sins,’ growled Hugh.

‘Perhaps not,’ said Janet primly : ‘but I am older and wiser now : and I see how foolish I used to be, and how wise Father was in checking our youthful follies.’

Kinfell thought that the old foolish Janet was a pleasanter person than the new Janet, pink of propriety though she might be. But he kept his thoughts to himself, and lit another cigarette.

‘I must say,’ went on Janet, ‘that I was very much surprised that Viola spoke to you as she did, when she found that Captain Bateson had not accompanied you. Her conduct did not appear to me to be at all seemly. I think that even if she so far forgot herself as to lose her temper before her husband, she should have remembered what was due to her visitors.’

This was more than Hugh could stand—more than any husband could stand. The fact that there was an element of truth in it, that Viola should not have lost her temper with her husband, still more that she should not have done so before his cousins, made Janet’s remarks all the more unpardonable.

‘Look here, Janet,’ said Hugh sternly, ‘we will have no more of this. Please remember that Viola is my wife : and that I permit no criticism of her conduct in my presence.’

Janet was not a little startled at this outburst : not

only startled, but a little scared. Hugh was a good-tempered fellow : but she knew from the old days that he could be angry on occasions, and that when his anger was aroused he was to be feared.

‘I’m sorry, Hugh,’ she said at last : ‘I didn’t mean to make you cross. I’d no idea you’d mind what I said.’

By this time Hugh had recovered himself.

‘Don’t say anything more, Janet. I, too, am sorry that I spoke sharply. I ought to have remembered that you are my cousin and my guest. But when Viola is in question, I can’t control myself. So remember in future, that I cannot discuss my wife with any one.’

This seemed very strange to Miss Farquhar : what funny things men were ! If *she* were a married woman, there was nothing she would have liked better than to talk over her husband’s virtues and foibles with Flora. However, if Hugh were like this, it was no use quarrelling with him. Wherefore, she wisely changed the subject and began to discuss that refuge of the destitute, the weather.

By dinner-time Viola had completely recovered her good humour—her temper never lasted for long : but she had grown so accustomed to have her own way that it upset her when she did not. To ‘love thyself last’ is an acquired taste, and there is nothing to recommend it to the natural man or woman. Viola’s temper, however, was so good by nature, that all the spoiling which she had received could not damage it for long : so by dinner-time she was as airy and agreeable as she had ever been. At least she appeared so : and her somewhat dull-witted husband imagined that she was. But, like all fundamentally good-natured people, Viola did not get over things as quickly and completely as she seemed to do. She was not unforgiving : her feeling did not

go as deep as that : but every time that a person seriously annoyed her, she liked that person a little less. She did not treasure up her husband's causes of offence as a sulky woman would have done : but every time that he offended her, left her a little less tolerant of him than she had been before. It was very gradual, very imperceptible : but in its cumulative effect it was deadly all the same.

The conversation at dinner naturally turned to the day spent in town, and Flora strongly expressed—as she always did when she thought of them—her disapproval of trams. ‘I cannot think why they are allowed,’ she went on : ‘they are bad for everybody—for horses and carriages as well as for motors.’

‘But they aren't bad for the people who haven't got any horse or carriages or motors,’ suggested Viola.

‘Oh ! I wasn't thinking about them,’ said Flora, who, as a matter of fact, never did ‘think about them’ except in a certain way. That was another point on which Viola and her relations-in-law never could see eye to eye : she had no idea—she was incapable of having any idea—what rank and birth meant to her husband and his cousins. Kinfell and the Farquhars were more than aristocratic in their views—they were positively feudal ; and to them the lower classes existed simply as appanages to the aristocracy. They were very good to all the people on their estates : the doctrine of *noblesse oblige* was ingrained in their very bones : but as for regarding the lower orders as of the same material as themselves—well, the idea was simply unthinkable. They were much kinder to what they called ‘the poor’ than Viola was : but the idea that each class has its rights and responsibilities—an idea which she had taken as a matter of course in her wandering and varied life—had so far never risen above their mental horizon.

‘I do not think that all these cheap ways of getting about are at all good for the lower classes,’ remarked Janet: ‘they make them restless and dissatisfied. Why can’t they be content to stay at home and look after their own houses, as their grandparents used to do?’

‘Why can’t we, if you come to that?’ asked Viola.

‘Oh! we are different,’ explained Janet.

‘Not at all,’ retorted Lady Kinfell, who dearly loved an argument: ‘our grandparents used to stay at home and revel in it, but we don’t: so why should you expect what you call the lower classes to be more like their grandparents than we are like ours. Time is not a prerogative of the Upper Ten, though space may be.’

Flora pursed up her mouth. ‘It is revolutionary views such as yours, Father says,⁵ that are ruining the country: and I must say I don’t like them any more than I like the trams. I never rode in a tram in my life, and I never mean to do.’

Viola laughed. ‘Then you miss a lot—that’s all I can say! Before I was married I used to go in trams a lot, and in omnibuses too, and I used to adore listening to the conversations of the other passengers. I heard a good deal of family history of sorts.’

Janet looked shocked. ‘Oh, Viola, how ill-bred to listen to other people’s conversations!’

At this Hugh’s brow grew as black as thunder, but his wife took it all in good part. ‘I couldn’t help it, not being deaf, and not having any wax handy to stick into my ears as Ulysses used to do when the Sirens were about: and it would have been more ill-bred still to put my fingers into my ears, besides taking up more than my share of public room by poking my elbows out. I remember howling with laughter once because the tram started before I had

landed safely on my seat, and I accidentally trod upon the foot of a large lady sitting by the door.'

'Did you hurt her?' asked Hugh, in a wild and hopeless effort to steer the conversation safely between the Scylla of Flora and the Charybdis of Janet.

'Frightfully! And all the rest of the way she kept murmuring her agonies to two friends who accompanied her. "My feet are so tender," she groaned; "I always have to take such care of my feet." And then the friends looked at me as if I was red from the massacre of innocents. I felt inclined to ask her, if she valued her feet so much, why she left them lying about in the central aisle of a tram-car.'

'You couldn't exactly say she left them lying about,' argued Janet, 'when they were on her.'

Viola gave a little squeal of delighted mirth: the Farquhar lack of humour was never lost upon her. Then she went on, "'This is one of my unlucky days," the martyr continued; "first I came downstairs with only one ear-ring in, then I mislaid my umbrella, and now *this*—!" pointing to me: and the friends looked at me as if I had massacred a fresh lot of innocents, while I was shaking with suppressed laughter.'

'I hope she didn't see you were laughing,' said Flora.

'She must have had precious poor eyesight if she didn't! But the climax was reached when she said, "I wonder if all these misfortunes portend anything. I often think these things are sent for a purpose." That, I own, completely unmanned me and I laughed outright.' And Viola gurgled again at the memory.

There was an ominous pause. Then Janet said, 'I wonder if the poor creature was right. Personally I often think that small misfortunes do predict greater ones.'

At that Viola squealed in perfect ecstasy, and even Hugh laughed. 'My dear Janet, what nonsense!'

he said. 'As if Viola's treading on anybody's toe could be a portent of misfortune.'

'I'm a fair weight,' said Viola, 'when I let myself go.'

'But there was the ear-ring and the umbrella,' persisted the gloomy Janet.

'Yes: I was only, so to speak, the last straw,' added the irrepressible Lady Kinfeil.

'Perhaps the poor thing was a Scotswoman, and had a sort of portent in her family which always presaged misfortune,' Janet suggested. 'Some Scottish families have.'

'Or perhaps she was Irish,' added Flora, 'and had a Banshee.'

Viola shook her head. 'She wasn't: she was Cockney, pure and undefiled. And any way I'm sure Banshees don't tread on people's toes or ride in trams. If you and Janet wouldn't ride in a tram, I'm sure a Banshee wouldn't! They are awfully select sort of people, are Banshees, and never do anything less refined than screaming: in fact I believe that like the Queen of Spain they have no legs.'

'Why didn't the Queen of Spain have any legs?' asked Flora, who added to her other excellences an insatiable thirst for information.

'Because she didn't want any,' replied Viola: 'queens only want a head to put a crown on: they have no use for legs. It is only what you call the lower orders that want legs in order to go about more than their grandparents used to do: and even they supplement their legs with trams and omnibuses, which you think so wrong of them, because their grandparents didn't.'

Hugh's heart sank into his pumps, as it always did when Viola was in what he called to himself 'one of her pert moods.' He knew exactly how the things

she said shocked his cousins. In fact they would have shocked him, if she had not been his wife and if he had not been still madly in love with her. As it was, they merely made him miserable, and they continued to make him miserable for the rest of that evening, and for many evenings yet to come.

CHAPTER VIII

BARBARA LANE

THE more beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother does not always find her lot cast upon a bed of roses : and the plain daughter of a beautiful mother stands the chance of a still less rosy existence. In the natural course of events the instinct of motherhood eliminates all thoughts of self from the maternal heart, and the mother lives life over again in her daughter, sharing the childish sorrows of the latter and triumphing once more in her youthful conquests. What says the middle-aged father ?—

‘ You ’ll in your girls again be courted,
And I ’ll go wooing with my boys.’

This is the natural sequence of events, and the most usual : and—being the natural and the ordinary state of things—it follows that it is the best. But it is not an invariable rule, especially in the case of very good-looking mothers ; exceptionally pretty women are apt to be spoilt ; and it is a far cry from the selfishness of a spoilt beauty to the absolute selflessness of the ideal mother. And there is something to be said for the poor spoilt mother after all. The more admiration and adulation she received in her heyday, the less excitement will she derive from the tamer sport of being courted in her girls : and the larger the realm over which she ruled, the less easy will she find it to hand on the sceptre to younger hands. Thus even the beautiful mother of a more

beautiful daughter will—if she has any dregs of the old Eve remaining in her—have her trials; but they will be nothing to the trials of the beautiful mother of a daughter who is not beautiful at all. Then there will be no handing on of the sceptre to younger and fairer hands, but the disappearance of the sceptre from the family altogether. True, Henry iv. did not enjoy the sight of his son trying on the crown of England; but still less would he have enjoyed the vision—had he lived to see it—of that crown being worn by the rival House of York!

But even the trials of the beautiful mother of an unbeautiful daughter are as nothing compared with those of the unbeautiful daughter herself. These not infrequently verge upon the province of tragedy. It is always more or less of a deprivation to a girl to be denied the gift of beauty—that gift which is an ‘open sesame’ to all the doors of life, before which the doors of wealth and love and success and happiness fly open at a word. Still if a girl doesn’t possess this gift she doesn’t; and it is ‘up to her’ (as the Americans say) to make up for this lack by the cultivation of such other gifts and graces as have been bestowed upon her by her somewhat niggardly fairy godmother. And most young women leave it at that. But if the girl thus denied of Nature’s greatest gift has a mother in full possession of it, her lack instead of a passive becomes an active omission. Not only does she feel it her misfortune not to be good-looking—she also feels it in some measure her fault. It is true of this as of everything else, that people who are not used to a thing do not feel the want of it. Lack of means never reaches its height of misery save in the case of those who have once seen better days: absence of rank is in itself no cause for distress; but those who have fallen from a high estate know not where to hide their diminished heads: and in the same way

the lack of beauty in a circle where beauty has been a family tradition and a matter of paramount importance, is an agony undreamed of in families of sterner mould and more intellectual endowments. But the tragedy of the plain daughter of a handsome family is by no means a unique tragedy : it is equalled—nay, surpassed—by the stupid son of a brilliant household, or by the one feeble scion of a strong and sturdy house. The child who consciously or unconsciously breaks through the family tradition always has a hard lot. This misery is an antique, tribal thing, having its roots in those old, unhappy, far-off days, when—as in the animal world to-day—the tribe or the herd persecuted to death any of its members which did not conform to type. It is a survival of those prehistoric times when man lived as the brutes that perish, and shared his customs and his habits with those lower orders of creation.

The Windybanks had been a singularly good-looking family : the Windybanks had been inordinately proud of their good looks : William Lane had married Lucy Windybank for her beauty, as Charles Chalfont had married her sister Julia ; but—unlike Charles—William had never ceased to worship and make a fetish of his wife's loveliness : therefore it came about that the absence of beauty in Lucy's children was considered as little less than a family misfortune, and a dispensation of Providence which Lucy had not deserved. Both Lucy's children were plain : there was no denying that obvious fact : even their adoring grandmother did not attempt to do so for long. But Willic outgrew his plainness : and the rather ugly little flat-faced boy developed into a huge and rather good-looking young man. His unusual height and breadth made up for his minor shortcomings ; and his rather thick and uninteresting features were far more becoming to a big man than

they had been to a small child. As he developed into manhood, Lucy Lane became very proud of her big, fine son ; and she had every reason to be.

But although Barbara had inherited her mother's curly copper-coloured hair, beautiful grey-green eyes and fair skin, there the likeness ended : for she had also inherited her father's commonplace features and bluntness of outline. The rather thick nose and carelessly modelled chin, which suited Willie after he grew up and added to his stalwart and manly appearance, were not so becoming to his sister ; especially when seen in constant juxtaposition with her mother's delicately pointed features and cameo-like clearness of outline. Barbara Lane was by no means an ugly girl : she was one of those whom, as the country people say, ' would pass in a crowd ' ; and if she had not belonged to an exceptionally good-looking family she would have passed in that crowd very creditably. But as it was, she was a sore disappointment to her family, especially to her mother ; and most of all—poor child !—to herself. As she grew up she never went into society with her mother without imagining that people were constantly saying, ' What a pity that that pretty Mrs. Lane has such a plain daughter ! ' And, as a matter of fact, she was not far wrong. With an ordinary mother, Barbara would have passed for a comely and pleasant-looking girl : but with Lucy's remarkable beauty still strongly in evidence, defying so far the ravages of time, the odds against Barbara were too great ; people could not help comparing her with her mother, greatly to her disadvantage.

All this may seem very small and insignificant to older people, and even to a certain type of girl : but it did not seem either small or insignificant to Barbara Lane. According to the measure of her family she had been weighed and found wanting : and this is no trifling matter to any sensitive soul. Unfortun-

ately Barbara added to her other disadvantages an extreme sensitiveness ; and the circumstances of her life had developed this sensitiveness into positive morbidity ; which, in its turn, reacted upon her character. On the one hand this almost morbid sensitiveness made her quiet and reserved beyond her years, and caused a lack of that easy self-confidence which is one of the surest ways to social success. But on the other hand it rendered her unselfish and considerate to a superlative degree, since she was terrified of hurting the feelings of other people as hers had so often been hurt : and also it implanted very early in her youthful soul a determination to make up for her want of looks by pleasant manners and agreeable conversation : in short, she took far more trouble to be a delightful and interesting companion than she would ever have done had she been as pretty as her mother. She knew that no one forgives a girl for being bad-tempered unless she is also good-looking : therefore she trained a naturally easy temper into a very triumph of delightful amiability. She knew that a woman must either be worth looking at or worth talking to : therefore she made herself abundantly worth the latter. If our outward appearance is to some extent the expression of our characters, our characters are also partly the result of our outward appearance. The one reacts upon the other. Just as Viola Chalfont's beauty had made her selfish and arrogant and indifferent to others, so Barbara's want of beauty had rendered her amiable and unselfish and almost morbidly considerate of other people's feelings. The girls were nearly akin, and when they were children were not unlike in character : it was simply the accident of beauty that made them grow up into such widely different women. Then who are we that we should praise the one or blame the other ? It was not Viola's fault that she was

beautiful, though it may have been Barbara's misfortune that she was the reverse.

Barbara Lane was not a happy girl : she was too sensitive and too much dissatisfied with herself. The happiness that springs from unselfish sources is not a prerogative of youth : it belongs to the noble army of mothers rather than to the goodly fellowship of daughters : and it is doubtful if there is such a thing as youthful happiness without a certain ingredient of youthful vanity. But though Barbara was not altogether a happy girl, she was by no means a miserable one. She was endowed with excellent health and with a very fair modicum of wealth—that is to say she had never suffered from the want of anything which it was in the power of money to buy : and if she and her mother were not altogether in harmony, there was a perfect sympathy and understanding between her father and herself. While Willie and his mother usually pulled together, Barbara and her father were inseparable friends : and though in the very nature of things, the tie between father and daughter is never quite as close as that between mother and daughter can be, still the difference in sex—if it lessens mutual understanding—adds to the excitement of life. To put it in modern parlance, there is always more fun in a friendship between persons of different sexes—be they father and daughter, brother and sister, husband and wife, or only ordinary comrades—than there ever can be in a friendship between persons of the same sex, even though the latter be the closer and more absolutely comprehending intimacy.

Barbara's great delight was going with her father on his rounds in his little motor-car : and the beautiful scenery amidst which they dwelt appealed to her as much as it did to him. Many long talks did these two have together on their long motor rides : and Barbara learnt to drive the car as well as Dr. Lane did.

‘It is so beautiful, Dad,’ she said to him one day as they were motoring to see a distant patient, ‘that it makes me want to cry. Why do beautiful things always make one feel sad, I wonder?’

Dr. Lane thought for a moment: then he said, ‘I think it is because our souls remember an existence when everything was beautiful—the Eden existence, before sin had come and marred everything: and so the sight of anything very beautiful reminds the eternal part of us of a life infinitely superior to this, and it makes us homesick. It is the dim memory of former perfection that makes us chafe against present imperfection.’

‘Then do you think that we have lived before?’

‘We have certainly lived before as a race if not as individuals. The story of the Fall of Man may be allegorical in its Eden form, but it is a true story for all that, and means that man was once in a perfect state and fell from that perfect state through disobedience to Divine law and order. Therefore what I call our racial memory may recall the lost happiness of the race and instinctively regret it. But—though I have no warrant for it—I incline to the belief expressed in Wordsworth’s ‘Ode on the Intimations of Immortality,’ and think that our individual souls had a previous existence on another plane.’

‘But not in this world? Do you think we ever lived before in this world, Daddy?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t see why we shouldn’t have done so: yet on the other hand there is no proof that we have.’

‘Except that feeling we all have, that things which happen to us have happened before.’

Dr. Lane shook his head. ‘That might be accounted for by the racial memory.’

The road suddenly began to wind, so the doctor’s

attention was taken up by his driving : but when it had straightened itself out again, he continued : ‘ Nevertheless, if we have lived on this earth before, it seems to explain things which otherwise seem inexplicable. I mean it does away with the apparent injustice of different people being born in such different circumstances. For instance, it seems hard ‘for one man to be born in extreme poverty, whilst another is born with what is commonly called “a silver spoon in his mouth” : but if the first man had already once been born rich and had abused those riches, it is quite fair for him to be born again quite poor.’

‘ And probably if he had used his riches well, he would have been born still richer the second time,’ suggested Barbara.

‘ Not necessarily, my dear. It is possible that in a former life he had passed all tests except that of poverty ; and that, before he could be perfected, he had to pass that test also.’

‘ I suppose that would apply to every gift,’ remarked Barbara thoughtfully : ‘ to beauty and intellect as well as to wealth.’

‘ Undoubtedly. I remember once reading a very interesting story about a wicked and beautiful woman who was doomed to be born again into her own family to expiate her sins. The family were looking out for her in every generation among the beauties : but in the end she turned up again as a very ugly old maid who devoted her life to works of charity, and so expiated the sins and follies of her former incarnation.’

Barbara remained thoughtful : ‘ I see. And that idea would explain why sometimes people’s insides and outsides don’t match at all. I mean you find a very poor insignificant person with all the pride and arrogance of a rich and powerful one ; and a very ugly woman with all the follies and airs and graces

of a beauty ; and an absolutely commonplace creature with the whims and fancies and eccentricities of a genius. Perhaps they originally were great nobles and beauties and geniuses, and can't get out of the habit of it ; or perhaps in this incarnation they are living epistles which have somehow or other got popped into the wrong envelopes. A good many people have got into the wrong envelopes, don't you think ?'

Dr. Lane laughed. ' They certainly have.'

' Nice, poetical, sentimental epistles get by mistake into ugly, rough, business-like envelopes,' continued Barbara : ' while horrid bills which are always being paid and never seem to be receipted, get into lovely tinted envelopes more suitable for valentines. Of course, if you are wise, you know that the envelope is only fit for the waste-paper basket, and that it is the letter inside that really matters ; but people aren't always wise.'

' Far from it, little girl. They are often so taken up with the beauty or the ugliness of the envelope that they never trouble to read the letter at all : or else they put off the reading till too late.'

' I think it is rather a pity that human stationery is not all made to match—paper and envelopes all *en suite*, don't you know ? But perhaps they were in a former existence, and the present envelopes matched the former writing-paper : and we are just working them all off, in order to get a thoroughly new and correct outfit next time.'

' That may be so, my dear. But one thing is certain—at least to my mind it is. Whether or not we have lived before, we shall certainly live again ; and we are now deciding the sort of people that we shall be in the next life. Are we laying up treasure in heaven ? Then we shall be rich. Are we crushing everything in our nature that is evil and ugly, and

cultivating everything that is beautiful and good ? Then we shall most certainly have a beautiful spiritual body, whatever our natural body may have been. Are we learning to acquire the wisdom that is not of this world ? Then we shall take our place among the great intellects and the geniuses of the world to come. Whether the present life is a consequence of a former one I cannot tell you : but I can tell you that the future life will be the consequence and the result of the present one. If the Bible teaches anything at all, it certainly teaches this.'

Barbara nestled up to her father, as they went rapidly along the now straight road, the soft air blowing deliciously in their faces. ' You really are the most comforting person to talk to, Daddy ! You start one thinking, and they are always such nice thoughts. I shall now set about writing such a first-rate living epistle that in my next life it will deserve a beautiful illuminated envelope all to itself.'

Dr. Lane looked down upon her with a tender smile : ' It is a very nice envelope, as it is, to my thinking : nice pink and white paper with gilt edges.'

' Not gilt, Daddy—copper.'

' Copper on the envelope, perhaps : but gold inside—twenty-two carat.' And Dr. Lane was not far wrong.

But when Barbara was about twenty, a change came over the spirit of her dream, and her intangible sorrows were merged in a very real and terrible one. For some time Dr. Lane's health had shown signs of breaking up ; and as soon as Willie was qualified he went into partnership with his father and relieved the latter of as much as possible. But although he was a clever boy and did very well in his medical examinations and in his work at the hospitals, he naturally had not had much experience : and so his father's patients preferred Dr. Lane's ministrations

to those of his son : with the consequence that the doctor was not able to take things as easily as he ought to have done. Willie was really far more competent than either his father or his patients gave him credit for ; but Dr. Lane was one of those super-conscientious men who never leave to anybody else anything that they can possibly do themselves. Had he realised that Willie was perfectly competent to undertake the larger and lighter half of his practice, he might have lived a good many years longer : but he absolutely refused to realise this ; with the result that Willie had to undertake the practice altogether.

Dr. Lane persistently overdid himself until there was no recuperative power left in him. And then he quietly turned his face to the wall and died, leaving one of those tremendous blanks in the lives of his friends and his patients which are sometimes made by the disappearance of apparently insignificant personalities.

Although it would be untrue to say that Mrs. Lane did not feel her husband's death, nevertheless her grief was quite bearable. It was the sort of grief that is capable of being mitigated by the becomingness of the mourning ; and as everybody has come across that sort of grief, either in themselves or in other people, there is no need to describe it further. Lucy Lane had loved her husband, and—in spite of her exceptional good looks—had never given him the slightest cause for jealousy ; but also she had never quite forgiven him for not being as handsome or as well-born or as well-dressed as her sister's husband, Charles Chalfont, even though he had proved himself as good a husband as Colonel Chalfont was a bad one. But the latter's smart appearance and social prestige had set a cachet upon Julia's beauty which Lucy's had unfortunately lacked : and in her heart of hearts Lucy had never quite pardoned William Lane for

this omission. She had always silently blamed William that her children's noses were not the right shape : which, when one comes to think of it, was really far more her doing than his, since the shape of William's nose was undoubtedly his misfortune ; while—at any rate in its relation to her children—it was Lucy's fault. It was she—not he—who had selected the nose of Willie's and Barbara's father : and therefore it was most unreasonable of her to lay the blame upon him. But Lucy had always been an unreasonable woman, and always would be.

Willie had loved his father very deeply, and the doctor's death was a real sorrow to him. But while he loved his father, he adored his mother ; and the latter now made such extravagant demands upon his love and sympathy that he really had no time to attend to his own grief. Lucy was one of those exquisite, fragile-looking women who must lean heavily upon some one. For nearly a quarter of a century she had nearly crushed William to the earth with her weight, and before that she had leaned equally heavily upon her mother and Caroline. (Never upon her father, however. He loved her more than he had ever loved anybody, but he would not stand any leaning : those who attempted it soon found out their mistake !) Now that William had gone, Lucy transferred the full weight of her exquisite fragility to Willie's broad shoulders, and it took him all his time to stand up against it. But it made him love his mother more than ever : and it also transformed him into the raw material of an ideal husband in the days to come.

But with Barbara it was different. Her father had been her world—the one being whom she loved with a perfect love—and when she lost him she was bereft indeed.

For a time the poor girl was absolutely stunned

with grief: and Willie—who was an affectionate brother as well as a rising doctor—was seriously concerned for her health. He tried to make his mother understand what Barbara was suffering; but that was a task beyond his powers. Mrs. Lane always measured her feelings, so to speak, in a medicine-glass: there was no rule of thumb with her. She remembered how much she had felt her own father's death, and she measured Barbara's present grief accordingly: nothing could have convinced her that either Barbara or any one else could feel any differently from what she felt in similar circumstances. In the same way, now that William was dead, she thought she knew exactly what her mother felt when her father died; and likewise what Barbara would feel if ever it was her misfortune to lose a husband. The measurements in Mrs. Lane's spiritual medicine-glass were clearly and accurately defined; she never dreamed of departing from them.

Now that she knew exactly how much it hurt to lose a husband, she felt a certain amount of slightly contemptuous surprise at the fuss that her mother had made when Dr. Windybank was called to his fathers. It is true that Mrs. Windybank's weeds were not nearly as becoming as were Lucy's; and though Lucy would have shrunk from ever formulating such a thought, it was nevertheless present in her subliminal consciousness. Lucy Lane was one of the women whose beauty was a constant source of joy and happiness to her. In her present sorrow it supported her amazingly. But her own explanation of her state of mind was a serene thankfulness that she had displayed so much more resignation and fortitude than did 'poor dear Mamma' in similar circumstances.

But Willie was not so blind. So he took matters into his own hands, and suggested to his mother and

sister that he thought it would do Barbara a world of good to go back home, and spend a year or two with her grandmother and aunt at Northbridge.

Mrs. Lane took to the suggestion at once. She was really a kind mother according to her lights, and especially when her children's interests in no way clashed with her own; and she was always generous to them in regard to money matters. To Barbara it brought the first ray of light that had dawned on her since her father's death. Her happy childhood had been passed at Northbridge: there she had spent those careless sunny days, before it ever dawned upon her that, according to the standards of her family, she was a failure: and the glamour of childhood hung about Northbridge still. Moreover, she had the feeling, common to us all, that if we return to the old familiar places, the old familiar joys will be ours once more. As we grow older, we know that this will not be so: but an instinct deeper than any knowledge still whispers that it will. And as it is against the immutable laws of nature that any instinct shall be incapable of fulfilment, does not this mean that in the real world, of which this world is but a type and a shadow, the old familiar joys are still awaiting us in the old familiar places: and that when the promise is fulfilled that 'they shall build the old wastes and raise up the former desolations,' we shall find not only the new heavens but also the new earth? And the new heavens and the new earth shall remain for ever: they shall be stable and secure.

So it was arranged that Mrs. Lane and Willie should stay on in the home which Dr. Lane had built for himself in New Zealand, and that Willie should carry on his father's practice: while Barbara should come back to Northbridge and stay for an indefinite period with her grandmother and aunt.

If this arrangement was a source of satisfaction to

all persons concerned in it, there was one person to whom it was a source of more than satisfaction—to whom it was a well-spring of exuberant joy : and that person was Mrs. Windybank. Some women are born wives—some are born mothers—some are born old maids—but Mrs. Windybank was a born grandmother. She had made a most loving and admirable mother ; but motherhood was too rife with responsibility to be unmitigated bliss to her. Mingled with her adoration of her children there was always a lurking doubt as to whether she was bringing them up as wisely as she might ; and this doubt very greatly adulterated her happiness. Mrs. Windybank was one of those women who—whatever went wrong—would always feel that in some way it was her fault. She was ever ready to find excuses for other people ; and equally ready to find occasions for blame in herself. She debited the whole of her husband's shortcomings to her account, being convinced that had she been a better and more attractive wife, he would have proved a steadier and more faithful husband ; forgetting entirely that by far the larger part of the handsome doctor's crop of wild oats was sown in his pre-matrimonial days. She considered that it was entirely owing to her inefficient manner of bringing up her daughters, that Caroline grew up self-willed, and Julia and Lucy vain and selfish ; never taking into consideration that they inherited these qualities in full measure from their father. But with the grandchildren it was different. She was not responsible for them : all she had to do was to spoil them to the top of her bent : and this she did most thoroughly. True, there was a time after Julia's death when she felt some stirrings of responsibility towards Julia's motherless child ; but Julia's husband made it so very clear that he did not want any interference from his wife's relations that even

Mrs. Windybank's sense of duty quailed before him. But with Willie and Barbara it had been all peace. Lucy considered herself competent, and more than competent, to bring up her own children; and Mrs. Windybank was so rooted and grounded in the utterly erroneous belief that her daughter was a far better mother than she had ever been, that she gladly desisted from any attempt to influence her darlings for their good, and gave herself up instead to the cultivation of their pleasure.

The blank which the departure of the Lane family had made in Mrs. Windybank's life had never been filled up: but she was too unselfish to allow either Caroline or Lucy to suspect how she fretted after the children. Such a possibility would never have occurred to Lucy: in the medicine-glass of her feelings she had no measurements as to the sentiments of grandmothers: she had never experienced them, and therefore (not unnaturally, perhaps) she concluded that they did not exist. She could quite understand that her mother would fret after her, because she—in similar circumstances—would fret after Willie and Barbara: but she felt no inclination to fret after Willie and Barbara's children, and therefore could not imagine how her mother could fret after hers. Yet, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Windybank missed the children far more than she missed Lucy.

To all our affections there is an official as well as a personal side; or perhaps it would be more correct (and certainly more up to date) to use the word 'cosmic' instead of 'official.' A mother loves her child as her child, quite apart from her love for it as a person; and the same thing is true of the love between brothers and sisters, and between husbands and wives. It is a great blow—and alas! an inevitable blow as we get on in life—to lose one parent: but when both parents are gone the loss is cosmic as

well as personal. The office is swept away ; and we ourselves are pushed to the back line, with nothing behind us—nothing to lean upon. In the same way as long as there is one child left, the nursery life goes on ; and as long as two members of the same family remain, there is still the official bond of family life to be relied upon ; and this is why, as a rule, large families are happier than small ones. Naturally in a large family there is more chance of a personal loss : but there is a far less chance of a cosmic one. The man with ten brothers has far more chance of losing a brother than the man with only one : but in his case the loss is personal, not official : the office of brotherhood is not swept away altogether, as it is in the case of the man who has only one brother. In this the loss is double—both personal and cosmic.

In the case of Mrs. Windybank, although Julia and Lucy were gone, Caroline remained : so that—sincerely as Mrs. Windybank missed her two younger children—the office of daughter was not left vacant. But when Dr. Lane carried off Willie and Barbara to New Zealand, there was no one left to take their place, and to fill the office of grandchildren in Mrs. Windybank's life. By that time Colonel Chalfont had cut off all communication with his late wife's people : so that the grandmotherly heart of Mrs. Windybank was empty indeed. And it remained empty for a good many years : indeed until Willie Lane's letter came, suggesting that Barbara should come back to Northbridge.

Then Mrs. Windybank's cup overflowed. She would not have admitted it for worlds : but she could not help secretly approving of an over-ruling Providence which had seen fit to remove ' poor William ' in order that Barbara should return to her mother's people. She spoke vaguely about all things working together for good : but that is what she really meant,

though she would not have put it into words even to her own soul. With true grandmotherly delight she refurnished Lucy's old room for Barbara—a room with a large window looking down the cliff to the river flowing at its foot. She had the walls covered with a white paper whereon pink roses climbed all over a trellis; she bought new bed and 'window curtains, with pink roses upon a white chintz ground; and she went to the crowning expense of a pink carpet, which—as Caroline pointed out—would show every footmark. But what did Mrs. Windybank care for that? Her youngest and favourite grandchild was coming back to her again, and nothing was too good for her darling. She would have ceiled Barbara's room with cedar and painted it with vermilion, had such been the fashion of the day: as it was, she contented herself with white enamel-paint and rose-covered chintzes and wall paper, and made a very pretty room of it at that.

Caroline laughed at all these preparations. 'Really, Mother, I don't see what you have done up this room for, though I must own that it is very effective: but surely what was good enough for Lucy is good enough for Lucy's daughter,' she said, when her mother asked her for about the thirtieth time to come in and see how Barbara's room was getting on.

'Not at all, my dear. And besides it had a good deal faded since Lucy's time, and looked dreadfully washed-out and shabby. And then dear Barbara is in such trouble, and I want to do all I can to comfort the poor child.'

'I don't see that a pink carpet will make up to her for the loss of her father,' remarked Caroline pertinently.

'Of course not, my dear: as if I should suggest such a thing! But still I do think that when one is in trouble it does help a bit if things are very nice,' replied Mrs. Windybank, who always made it a rule

to provide those of her friends who were in sorrow with all the things they liked best to eat. To Mrs. Windybank 'the bread of affliction and the water of affliction' were always translated in terms of oysters and sweetbreads and a half-bottle of champagne.

Caroline laughed as she kissed her mother. 'Dear old Mums, trust you for spoiling anybody who comes within half a mile of you.'

'I don't want to spoil the dear child, but I do want to comfort her: and I gather from what both Lucy and Willie say that she has felt her father's death most terribly.' Mrs. Windybank would never have been so disloyal as to hint even to Caroline that perhaps Lucy had not made Barbara's girlhood as happy as she might have done: but Mrs. Windybank knew her Lucy, and her Lucy's selfishness and vanity, though she described them even to herself as dear Lucy's self-respect and exquisite taste: she was shrewd enough to read between the lines of Lucy's letters how much disappointed Lucy was that her daughter had not inherited her beauty; and Mrs. Windybank had no illusions as to Lucy's power of punishing people who were so inconsiderate as to disappoint her in any way. If so meek a woman could be said to rebel against anything, Mrs. Windybank had rebelled against the Windybank pride in the Windybank beauty. She was fully aware of her daughters' good looks, but she considered that they thought too much of them, and gave personal beauty an undue importance over other natural gifts. As long as she herself was the only sufferer from this, she did not mind: but when she suspected that Barbara suffered also, the tigress, which is dormant in all true mothers and grandmothers, awoke in Mrs. Windybank: and she made up her mind that if ever she had the chance she would make up to Barbara

for all that Barbara might have suffered at her mother's hands.

'There is the postman,' remarked Caroline: 'I hear his knock. I'll go down and see what letters there are.'

A few minutes later she came back with a black-edged letter in her hand. 'Nothing wrong with the Lanes,' she said, knowing the trend of her mother's thoughts and fears, and making it the business of her life to save when possible that beloved mother's pain. 'It is a letter from Lord Kinfell saying that Charlie is dead after only a week's serious illness, though he seems to have been breaking up for some time. Think of it—first William Lane and now Charlie Chalfont! It never rains but it pours.'

'Oh, my dear, what an expression to use in such a connection! I am very sorry about Charles.'

'I don't see why you should be sorry, Mother: he was never at all nice to us: and for my part he is as much use to me dead as alive.'

'At a time like this such things are best forgotten, Caroline. I do hope he was prepared, but he never seemed to me a religious man. Still what am I that I dare judge any one? I dare say he was far better than I, if I only knew.'

'Stuff and nonsense, Mother! He was never fit to hold a candle to you, and never would be, and his being dead doesn't make any difference to my opinion of him.'

'And I am very thankful that dear Viola is married. It will keep the dear child from feeling lonely after her father's death,' added Mrs. Windybank, little dreaming how wide she was of the mark.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLIGHT

ALTHOUGH Viola did not feel the loss of her father as deeply as Barbara had felt the loss of hers, it nevertheless affected her more than she knew. Here again was shown the difference between the personal and the cosmic loss. Barbara had loved Dr. Lane far more than Viola had ever loved Colonel Chalfont, and Barbara's anguish at the death of her father was bitter and acute. But it was a personal, an individual loss. The office of parenthood was still filled by Mrs. Lane; and Barbara had the subconscious feeling that she had some one at the back of her on whom she could lean, and also some one to whom she was responsible. Although for the time the light of her life had been extinguished, the structure of that life remained intact: she was still a daughter in her parent's house—still a child under authority.

Although it is the personal element in a loss that breaks our hearts, it is the cosmic element that changes our characters, because it is the latter which alters our attitude towards life and our place in the scheme of existence. The death of Dr. Lane turned Barbara into a sad and sorrowful Barbara, but she was fundamentally the same Barbara as had rushed all over the country with her father in his motor-car, pouring out the inmost thoughts of her heart to him: it was only her moods and her feelings that had changed. But the death of Colonel Chalfont removed from Viola Kinfell the only restraining influence that she

had ever recognised in her frivolous and pleasure-loving career : with him, all sense of duty, all consciousness of responsibility, all submission to authority, passed out of her mind and out of her life : and the change thus wrought was enormous. True, the burden of filial obedience had sat but lightly on Viola's shoulders, and the power of parental authority had been scarcely more than a nominal force in her life. But, even in this attenuated condition, they had counted for something, and had to some slight extent controlled her wayward words and actions. As far as she was influenced by anything, she was influenced by her father's opinions.

Then suddenly this influence was removed altogether : and the consequences were disastrous both to Viola herself and to every one who had to do with her.

It would be untrue to say that Viola really mourned her father. She missed him of course : but, of late his failing health had rendered his society more of a burden than a pleasure to her : and her own perfect physical health made her impatient and intolerant of anything in the shape of illness. She had never really loved her father : he had never taught her to love him : but she had admired his good looks and social charm, and had been immensely impressed by his knowledge of the world. Naturally she was sorry that these brilliant gifts had so suddenly been extinguished : but alongside of her sorrow there existed an unconscious relief that his authority, scant as it was, had been removed.

It was now more than a year since her marriage : and gradually there was growing up in her wayward soul a conviction that she could not put up with Lord Kinfell any longer. He bored her too profoundly for endurance. She was not in the least inclined to fall in love with anybody else, though of course so beautiful

a woman had plenty of admirers and would-be lovers. She had no deeply-rooted principles to keep her straight, but she was by nature an essentially pure-minded woman; and her father's teaching in the ways of worldly wisdom had enlightened her as to the unpleasantness of the social punishments inflicted on those who transgress the moral law. Therefore although she was sorely tempted to run away from Lord Kinfell, she definitely decided that her run should be a solitary one.

As long as her father lived, the idea of what she called 'throwing up her situation' and starting a career of her own was strictly confined to the realms of the impossible. True, she often built castles in the air which were unshadowed by her husband's ponderous society, and where she dwelt at ease unhampered alike by his attentions and his scruples: but she fully realised that all such structures were unsubstantial pageants composed of the baseless fabric of a vision, and relegated to the world of dreams. Colonel Chalfont would have regarded such a notion as folly unthinkable, and therefore Viola did not seriously think of it so long as he was there to influence her. But after he was gone, his cool and practical common-sense began to lose its power: and Viola gradually came round to the idea that her castles in the air might come true after all.

With the instinct of a wild animal that hides anywhere when it is hurt, Viola carefully concealed whatever sorrow her father's death had caused her: and Hugh—perhaps not unnaturally—jumped to the conclusion that she did not care at all and was a thoroughly heartless young woman. Remembering the anguish that the death of his own parents had caused him, Hugh was staggered by the almost defiant stoicism which Viola displayed when Colonel Chalfont died. The Scots—like the Chinese—are

adherents to the worship of ancestors : and Hugh was very true to his Scottish blood in this respect. Had he been an older and a wiser man, he would have realised that his wife's very defiance of her grief proved that there was a certain amount of grief to be defied : and also that the late Colonel was hardly the man to inspire devotion in a young girl, even though this girl was his own daughter. Young love must have a certain amount of idealism in it or else it dies from attrition : the love which knows all and pardons all is the love of God and of mothers : but it is not the love of budding womanhood.

There is something very beautiful and also very pathetic in the longing of all women when they are young—and of some even when youth is over—for an ideal object on which to lavish their affection. Most of them think they have found this ideal, and they set it up in a shrine in their inmost souls. Then they find that the image, which they thought so perfect, has feet of clay : and then, according to their natures, they either break their hearts and grow bitter and sorrowful, or else they harden their hearts and become cynical and indifferent. This occurrence is so frequent among all sorts and conditions of women that it has ceased to rank as a tragedy, and is almost regarded as a commonplace : but for all that it leaves its mark upon most women's hearts.

And not only upon most women's hearts : it leaves its mark upon the lives of a good many men also. Perhaps more unhappy marriages are caused by this tendency upon the woman's part to idealise her husband than by anything else. A girl regards as a demigod the young man whom she is about to marry : then when she does marry him and finds him lacking in many demigodly traits—in short, when she discovers that she has taken to husband a very ordinary and human young man—she frequently

sets about breaking her heart, and incidentally his at the same time. She cannot forgive him for not being what he never expected or pretended or even wished to be. Let such a young wife take heed to the reproof administered to the Beloved Apostle when he fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed him so many things : ' See thou do it not : for I am thy fellow-servant and of thy brethren : worship God.'

But there is a lesson to be learned from the universal yearning for perfection planted in the heart of every woman. It is an axiom, both in physiology and psychology, that the existence of an instinct is the guarantee of its fulfilment : in nature the demand is always an earnest of the supply. Therefore the universal longing in the heart of Womanhood for an ideal without feet of clay, is no vain and profitless desire. Idol after idol does she set up in her secret heart ; and when one after another they fall down from their high estate, she still continues her untiring search for an idol that will not and cannot disappoint her. Surely this instinct is planted within her in order to spur her on to fresh endeavour until at last her quest is ended and she finds that Ideal whom she has sought so long ; that Ideal Who will never fail her, but will satisfy all the cravings of her soul : and when at last she finds Him she anoints His Feet with her costliest ointment of spikenard, and wipes them with the hair of her head, understanding at last that it was really He Whom she had been seeking all along, though she knew it not until He was made known to her in Breaking of Bread.

Although Colonel Chalfont had been the last man to fulfil a girl's ideal, Viola had nevertheless found him a delightful and amusing companion. And herein she missed him more than she realised, for her husband was to her the very opposite of this. Hugh

could never have been amusing to any one, and to Viola he was far from delightful : but all the same, had Fate so willed it, he was more capable than most men of fulfilling a romantic girl's ideal. In spite of his dulness and narrowness and obstinacy—and to deny that he was dull and narrow and obstinate would be unfair to Viola in telling the story of their lives—Hugh possessed the qualities out of which women's ideals are manufactured. He was brave and upright and loyal and devoted, and his word was any day as good as his bond. But unfortunately for him—and still more unfortunately for her—he lacked charm and wit and quickness of understanding, the special qualities which appealed to his wife. Had she been brought up to set her affections on and pin her faith to ideals, it might have been different : but Colonel Chalfont's easy cynicism had long ago stifled in her youthful soul all instinctive longings after higher things. To Viola, life was no more than meat, or the body than raiment.

In most human relationships there is one who kisses and one who offers the cheek : and both attitudes have their disadvantages. The one whose lot it is to kiss, suffers many pangs of unsatisfied longing and unrequited affection : but the one who offers the cheek has frequently to pay for immunity from pain by lack of interest. The offering of the cheek may be a painless occupation : but it is usually an overpoweringly dull one. Certainly Lady Kinfell found it so.

Another of Viola's counts against her husband was his taciturnity. She was a great talker herself, and her father had been a great talker : constant trivial conversation had been as the very breath of their nostrils : and Hugh's silence got on her nerves. He was one of those people who never say anything unless they have something to say : and whatever this

habit of life may gain in wisdom, it loses in social and cheerful intercourse. Hugh's idea of bliss was the silent and constant companionship of some one whom he loved : he was one of those who say that it is the test of true friendship if two persons can be happily silent in each other's company : but to Viola, companionship without conversation was no companionship at all : in fact it was worse than solitude, as she would far rather be alone than with a silent companion. This apparently trivial difference militated sorely against their mutual happiness, as it produced an atmosphere of continual strain. The continual and generally vain effort to keep up a conversation was very fatiguing to Hugh's type of mind ; whilst the long spells of silence when there was no third person present affected Viola's nerves till she sometimes thought she must scream.

For the first year of her married life Viola saw as little of her husband as was necessary, and thought of him even less : and when she did see him she generally arranged that some alien element should enlighten the deadly dullness of their marital conversation. But when her father died, her round of incessant gaieties was bound to cease to some extent for a time, owing to the exigencies of mourning—exigencies to which Viola herself gave little heed, but which were imperative in her husband's eyes ; and in certain matters such as this Hugh did put his foot down and have his own way : and then Viola found the dullness insupportable.

'It seems so absurd,' she said to him one day, 'to stop going into society just when you want it most. It is after anybody has died that something to cheer you up is most necessary. I think that after you have lost anybody that you are fond of, you should go to more parties than usual, so as to take your mind off the trouble.'

They were walking in the green and shady lanes which, in those happy days of the first decade of the century, lay between Eldhurst and Shooter's Hill. Long walks alone with him were among the diversions which Hugh considered suitable for Viola in the days of her mourning : which showed how he was lacking in even an elementary knowledge of his beautiful wife.

'But, darling, it would seem so wanting in respect,' he replied feebly.

'Who cares about such a footling thing as respect ? Daddy never wanted me to respect him when he was here ; and I'm sure he doesn't now, wherever he is, or if he is anywhere at all. What he always wanted was for me to enjoy myself as much as I could without bothering him : and if he is still himself, that is what he wants now.'

Hugh switched at the long grass growing under the hedge with his stick. He knew so well what he meant, and he found it so impossible to put it into words.

'What I can't understand,' he said, 'is that any one could want to go to parties, and all that, just after a near and dear relation had died : that is what beats me. I was only a kid when Father and Mother died, but I hated to go to things or to see people for ages afterwards. I couldn't even bear the school games for quite a long time.'

Viola tossed her head. 'I don't catch the connection of ideas. The fact that *you* don't care for a thing doesn't mean that *I* don't.'

Hugh felt a stab of pain at his heart. The truth of this remark cut him to the quick. Still he tried to be patient, and so blundered more and more. 'But, darling, if you went to parties now, it would look as if you didn't feel your father's death, don't you see ?'

'It wouldn't, stupid ! It would show that I did feel it, and therefore wanted to be diverted. The

more unhappy one is, the more diversion one wants. I can understand that if anything very nice happened, one might want to say "Not at home," and sit by oneself, and chew the cud of pleasant thoughts: but when the thoughts are sad, the less time one has for thought, the better. The whole idea of mourning seems to me idiotic. I think it would be much more sensible if brides stayed at home and saw no outside company, and just stewed in their own juice; while widows went out every night in their best clothes, and had dinner-parties given in their honour, and were fêted and made much of all round. A bride doesn't want diverting—at least it is her new husband's fault if she does; while a widow does want diverting—or it is her late husband's fault if she doesn't.'

The perplexed look, which always irritated his wife, settled upon Hugh's brow. 'But people wouldn't understand it in that way: and I don't think any nice-minded widow would care to be treated like that.'

'Custom: pure custom. If it was customary to treat widows like that, they'd simply adore it, and it would do them no end of good. But they've got accustomed to being sent to Coventry for a year, and are used to it, just as Indian widows are used to the Suttee and think it the correct thing. It's all on the same lines.'

'Not exactly,' said Hugh, who shared his cousin Flora's passion for accurate information. 'Suttee isn't a sign of mourning; it is a way by which the wife is able to rejoin her husband at once: and I think there is something rather fine in it when you look at it in that way.'

Viola shrugged her shoulders. 'Oh, Hughie, what nonsense! I should like to know where my husband had gone to before I set about rejoining him: and besides he isn't your husband at all after he is dead,

if you are a Christian, whatever Indians may be. Husbands only last till they die : it says so in the Prayer Book : or wives either.'

Hugh felt miserable. The mere thought of an existence wherein he and Viola were not indissolubly united was torture to him. 'Oh, Vi, I'm sure that you and I shall belong to each other for ever and ever. No heaven could be heaven to me without you !'

'No, we shan't : the Bible distinctly says we shan't. One of the few definite things told us about heaven is that there won't be any marrying there. Not much to go on, I admit : but still a foundation of possible happiness.'

Hugh said nothing. It was things like this that hurt him so dreadfully, and yet he was powerless to express his anguish. But he walked in silence down the grassy lane with his heart heavy within him : while Viola mistook his silence for sulks and resented it accordingly. So the breach between these two unhappy young people widened every day : and there was no one to set matters straight between them, or to help and advise them in any way. They were left entirely to their own devices : and their own devices were devices of the Evil One.

People are roughly divided into two classes : those who are better than they think, and those who think themselves better than they are : and Viola Kinfell belonged to the former division. By nature she was a very nice girl indeed : but her early training—or rather her absence of early training—and the adulation lavished upon her beauty, had proved too much for her natural niceness, and had nearly swamped it altogether. But some slight remains of it were still left in her untutored and wayward heart ; and these remains caused her to feel her father's death more than she thought she did. She knew that she was unhappy ; and like all young and healthy and high-

spirited creatures she rebelled against this unhappiness with all her might. But she put it all, or nearly all, down to her relations with her husband, and did not realise that a good deal of her misery was really sorrow on her father's account : a sorrow which, if she would only have patience, Time would slowly heal. But patience was the last thing that Lady Kinfell kept in stock : and she rapidly made up her untrained and uncontrolled mind that she would kick over the traces that she found so tiresome, and break the bonds that so sorely galled her. She was unhappy, she was reckless, she was accustomed to have her own way at all costs : her father who could manage her was dead ; and her husband's attempts to manage her only made her ten times more rebellious and reckless. Had her mother been alive—had she only been in touch with her grandmother—things might have been different. An older woman would have seen whither Viola was drifting, and would have stood between the girl and her mad resolve to bid for freedom at all costs : an older woman would have instructed her in the old wives' wisdom of the ages, and taught her that the foundations of married life are unselfishness and adaptability, and that she who most successfully rules her woman's kingdom is she who is servant of all : that in what is called 'the give and take' of married life, each must do all the giving and leave the taking to the other, or else there will be no mutual help and comfort in the affair : and that the expressions 'for worse' and 'for poorer' are not just inserted as unmeaning expletives to carry on the rhythm, but are a fundamental clause in the agreement. Like most brides, Viola regarded the holy estate as a shrine wherein she would reign enthroned as a goddess : but unlike most brides, she did not adapt herself to circumstances when she discovered her mistake, and found that the tutelary

goddess is very early called upon to come down from her shrine in order to 'serve tables.' In Viola's case the 'serving of tables' was certainly figurative rather than literal: but the principle was the same. Like all married men, after a time Kinfell expected to be regarded as a responsible husband rather than as an abject lover: while Viola refused to consider him as anything but a slave, and an unprofitable one at that. His insistence that she should refrain from balls and theatres and dinner-parties for a suitable time after her father's death was the last straw: it goaded her into deciding to run away from him, and it gave her time to consider how best to carry out this most unwise and unfortunate decision.

As has been said before, Viola had not the slightest idea of running away with anybody else. She had had enough of men for a time, and wanted to be rid of anybody and everybody who might try to interfere with her wishes or control her actions. With the small amount of common-sense which she happened to have inherited from her father's considerable store of it, she made up her mind to go first to Northbridge and take refuge with her grandmother, while she thought over what was best to do next. Of course Hugh would make a fuss: she was quite prepared for that: but she was shrewd enough to know that if she had actually run away, it would give her the upper hand, as if he wanted her to come back he would have to beg her to do so, and she could then make her own terms: while as long as she was under his roof, he had the upper hand, and it was for him to make terms and give orders, even if she utterly disregarded them. As she said to herself, 'If I've once run away it will be much easier to keep "still running," like *Charley's Aunt*, until Hugh consents to give me a large enough allowance to be independent of him, than it would be to induce him to make me

independent while I am still living here. In fact that would be quite impossible. If I merely suggested such a thing, he'd go obstinate and mulish at once, and reel out a lot of sentiment about the duty of wives, and antiquated old things like that. I shall write nothing to Granny beforehand, or else she'd write to Hugh to stop me, and then the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance. I shall just turn up at Northbridge, and ask her and Aunt Caroline to take me in, which I know they'll be only too delighted to do : and then I shall talk things over with them and see what is best to be done next. My present idea is to keep it dark from Hugh for a time where I have gone, so as to give him a good fright. He deserves it, he has been so horrid to me : and I'm sure Granny and Aunt Caroline will do as I tell them, and not write to Hugh, when they hear what a tiresome husband he is. And then when I think he has been punished enough, I'll write and tell him where I am : and by that time he'll be in such a state that he'll do whatever I want.

'Of course,' Viola continued her meditations, 'he may come and look for me at Northbridge at once, though I don't think that is likely : but I'm sure Granny would hide me if I asked her.' Here Lady Kinfell reckoned without her host—or rather without her hostess. She did not know how sacrosanct was the marriage-bond in the eyes of Mrs. Windybank, nor what reverence that good lady paid to the God-given authority of a husband. 'No : I know what I shall do. I shall pretend I have gone to Paris, and let him go and look for me there. A wild-geese chase like that will do him a lot of good.' And Viola laughed to herself with pleasure at the thought of it. 'I should like to see his face when he finds I'm gone ! It will be an eye-opener to his smug self-satisfaction. And Paris will make him feel worse : he'll think it

so awfully wicked, and imagine I am doing the most fearful things there.' And she laughed again. Then she went on making her plans : ' I shall take a ticket to Folkestone to make him think I'm going by the boat-train straight to Paris : and then I shall get out at the first stop, and go to London and so on to Northbridge. I mustn't take any luggage, as that would complicate matters : he'd know I hadn't gone to Paris if he found my luggage left at Folkestone ; and if it was labelled for Folkestone I couldn't very well get it out of the train on the way. I shall have just to take the clothes I'm wearing, and Aunt Caroline will have to lend me everything else till I can write home and have all my things sent after me.'

Thus Lady Kinfeil amused herself during her enforced seclusion by making plans for her mad escapade. The weather was very foggy just then—there was quite a spell of dense fog in town—so that she did not care to go up to London : and Satan fulfilled his usual rôle of general provider of mischief for idle hands and heads. She quite enjoyed making these arrangements. There was a spice of forbidden adventure about them which appealed to Viola's nature. And she almost forgave what she called her husband's sulks when she remembered how soon and how severely he was going to be punished.

Then a faint doubt as to how far her grandmother and aunt were to be trusted intruded itself upon her dreams : also her wings, already stretched for flight, began to flap, and she wondered if at Northbridge they would be allowed full play. As these forebodings grew upon Viola, she changed her mind about going straight to her grandmother's, and decided upon the more complete adventure of going off entirely by herself. She was very anxious to do nothing which would in any way mitigate the severity of Hugh's punishment ; and she felt it was possible

that Mrs. Windybank's heart might melt too soon. So Viola made up her mind to lose herself for a time in Merchester, the capital of the Midlands, where she was not known and so would not easily be traced, and which was not far from Northbridge; so that she would not have much further to go when she thought the time had arrived for her to seek shelter under the grand-maternal roof. It would be useless to try and hide herself in London, or in any large seaside town: she would be sure to come across somebody she knew: but she was not likely to meet any of her friends in a busy commercial centre like Merchester; and she felt it would be great fun to stay incognita in the largest hotel there for a few days, whilst her husband was searching for her in Paris. She had enough money in hand to last her for a long time: and the idea of absolute independence thrilled her with girlish delight. All of which serves to show that—however black succeeding circumstances against her might appear—Viola Kinfell was no bad woman, but just a naughty child bent on mischief.

In order to avoid any possibility of being traced and discovered before she chose to reveal her whereabouts, Viola bought a new set of underwear unmarked with her usual coronet and initials; and also a new and nameless week-end case, for her use while she was in concealment: and these she took with her to Ingleham for a last interminable Sunday there with her husband. Of course her maid took note of these singular purchases, but she was a discreet young woman who knew when to hold her tongue; and Lady Kinfell was the last person to explain herself to her servants.

On the Monday morning—after a dull and dreary Sunday, the gloom whereof was occasionally brightened by lurid passages at arms between himself and Viola—Hugh returned in his car to Woolwich, much re-

lieved in his mind that Viola had consented for once to follow his advice and stay on for a few days at the Moat, in order to escape from the fog which for the last week had hung about Eldhurst : and Lady Kinfell was left to her own mischievous devices.

After Hugh had gone she ordered her car to take her to Sevenash to catch the Folkestone train : and while she was waiting for it she wrote the following letter to her husband :

‘DEAR HUGH,—You are so very dull and boring and tiresome that I simply cannot live with you any longer. Nobody could. So I am off to Paris to have the really good time that your horrid fussiness has prevented me from having at home. VIOLA.’

‘There, that will make him sit up,’ she said to herself gleefully, as she sealed the letter, and addressed it to Eldhurst House where he was going to stay alone till her return : and left it on the hall-table to be posted with other letters.

Then she went upstairs to dress for her journey. She was wearing a black serge coat and skirt braided with military braid, as was the fashion in those days : and a black silk blouse with a high transparent collar which made her swan-like neck look even longer than it was. Viola might object to the principle of wearing mourning ; but she could not object to the practice thereof, as it so enhanced the beauty of her copper-coloured hair and dazzling complexion by force of contrast. She ordered her maid to bring her the plainest hat she possessed—a small fur toque, with a stiff black brush on the left side. Thus did women adorn themselves in the first decade of the century : and they looked quite as nice as they do to-day.

‘Your ladyship will want your fur coat,’ remarked the discreet maid : ‘it is a cold morning.’

‘No thank you, Bevan : my dark-grey tweed will do.’ Viola was fully aware that the handsome fur wrap would quickly disclose that identity which for the present she was so anxious to conceal. For this same reason she had discarded all jewellery, of which as a rule she wore a good deal.

‘But your ladyship must have a fur of some kind,’ urged Bevan ; ‘and a muff.’

‘All right. Give me the black fox necklet and muff, to match my toque.’

‘Yes, my lady. And will your ladyship be back in time to dress for dinner ?’

‘No : I probably shan’t come back to-day at all. Have that week-end case put in the car, in case I stay the night.’

The maid looked at the case with disgust as if it were a spider or a mouse. ‘Is that yours, my lady ? I don’t seem to remember it until I saw it a few days ago at Eldhurst—when your ladyship brought some parcels back in it from town.’

‘Yes, it’s mine. I got it the other day as I thought I might want it : and I didn’t wait to have my name painted on.’

‘Shall I pack it, my lady ?’ Bevan carefully kept all surprise or curiosity out of her voice, although she was almost bursting with both.

‘No : I’ve put in it what I may want for the night myself. Just send it down to the car.’

‘Very good, my lady.’

Viola picked up a pair of black suède gloves and went downstairs. While she was standing in the courtyard, waiting for the car to draw up on the other side of the bridge, she began to put her gloves on ; and as she did so, she caught sight of her wedding-ring—that symbol of all that had bored her so, and from which she was making her escape. With a sudden uncontrollable impulse she ran back to her

room, which by this time Bevan had vacated, and opened a secret door in the oak panelling on one side of the fireplace, which revealed a small cupboard about a foot square.

This hiding-place was known only to Viola, who had discovered it one day by accident, and—in one of the sudden fits of secretiveness which now and again attack the most outspoken people—had never mentioned it even to Hugh. She liked to feel that she had one spot where she could hide anything away from everybody. In a shorter time than it takes to write it she had taken off her wedding ring—the ring inside which was engraved ‘Hugh to Viola’ and the date of their marriage—put it into the secret cupboard, and slipped back into its place the piece of panelling that formed the hidden door which immediately shut with a spring. Then she ran downstairs again, crossed the courtyard and the drawbridge, and sprang into the car which was to carry her to freedom.

‘I shall not be back to-night,’ she said to the butler as he tucked the fur rug round her knees. ‘Forward his lordship’s letters to Eldhurst, and keep mine till I come back.’

And then off she started into the wide world alone : but not altogether without a pang. It hurt her to be leaving her beautiful home, though it did not at all hurt her to be leaving its master. But then she loved the place : and she did not at all love the man.

CHAPTER X

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

VIOLA carried out her plans as arranged. She went to Sevenash station and took a ticket and a train for Folkestone, keeping her week-end case in her hand. Then, at the first stop, she slipped out of the train, and took the next one back to London. On arriving at Charing Cross, she went by Underground to Praed Street, thence to Paddington, and took a ticket and a seat in a third-class carriage *en route* for Merchester. Once more her native shrewdness came to her aid, and suggested that if she travelled third-class her identity would be more carefully concealed, and the likelihood of tracing her be reduced.

She ensconced herself in an empty carriage near to the engine (railway carriages often being empty in those spacious times before the War), and congratulated herself on the prospect of travelling alone: but, just before the train started, a girl of about her own age, and also in deep mourning, got in and took a seat on the opposite corner of the carriage. This newcomer was as tall as Viola but much slighter, and had similar copper-coloured curly hair, moss-agate eyes, and delicate complexion. But there the likeness ended; for the girl's features were commonplace, though her height and colouring gave her decided charm and distinction. Unlike her fellow-traveller, the stranger had a good deal of luggage and many extra packages, having evidently come on a long journey,

Till the train started the girl was so busy with the opening ritual of a railway journey—the disposing of wraps, the hoisting of certain packages into the rack, the distribution of others on to the unoccupied seats, and the selection and purchase of newspapers from the boy outside the window—that Viola did not properly see her until these rites were concluded and the girl was safely settled in her seat: then Lady Kinfell was struck by something familiar in her features. But before she had time to trace this vague familiarity to its source, the quicker mind of the Colonial-trained girl had outstripped her, and Viola heard her fellow-traveller exclaim:

‘Why, I do believe it is my cousin Viola!’

Then memory reasserted itself, and Viola exclaimed in turn: ‘Why, it’s Barbara—Barbara Lane!’

So it was: and before many minutes were over, the two cousins had, figuratively speaking, flung themselves into each other’s arms, and renewed their childish friendship.

Of course Barbara was much more pleased to see Viola than Viola was to see her: that was only natural: in the old days Barbara had adored her beautiful elder cousin, while Viola had calmly tolerated Barbara’s adoration; and it was Barbara’s way to give affection and Viola’s to receive it. But, nevertheless, Viola felt much more friendly towards her cousin than she would have felt six months previously. A revolt against her husband always turns a woman’s thoughts towards her own people and her father’s house: and Viola was so unusually lacking in resources of this kind that a first-cousin meant a good deal to her. Officially Barbara stood for what, to most girls of Viola’s age, is represented by father and mother and brothers and sisters: and she gained value in Viola’s eyes accordingly.

No one else came into the carriage, and the two

girls talked nineteen to the dozen, for a solid hour, recalling common memories and supplying sufficient personal information to bring each other respectively up to date. Though they had not met for ten years the tie of blood was between them; and also the stronger tie of family resemblance, not only in outward but also in inward characteristics.

There are some people with whom we are thrown into intimate personal relations, and with whom we hold familiar converse for many years; and yet all the time they never learn to speak our language or to share our thoughts. And there are others whom we hardly know at all in the ordinary sense—strangers whom we have never met before, or friends from whom we have been separated for ages—who yet understand our thoughts, and talk our language. Nay, more than that: who talk our own particular patois, and express themselves in our special provincialisms, and require no translation of the most intimate idioms of our spiritual speech. Although they had not seen each other since they were children, Viola felt that Barbara understood her as Hugh and his cousins had never understood her; and that she could say things to Barbara that she had never said to anybody in her life before.

When the two girls had duly condoled with each other on the deaths of their respective fathers, and had each brought their autobiography more or less up to date, Barbara naturally inquired whither her cousin was bound. And that pulled Viola up short. So volatile was her nature and so shallow were her feelings, that in the excitement of meeting Barbara and renewing their childish friendship, she had for a time completely forgotten that she was a runaway wife: but now the memory of her equivocal position suddenly rushed upon her, and she perceived how this encounter with her cousin would increase the

difficulty of preserving her incognita. At first she thought she would put Barbara off with a false and plausible explanation—say she was going to visit friends, or something of that kind : but then what excuse could she make for asking Barbara to keep the whole affair a secret ? No : that would never do : even the hare-brained Viola could see that. Besides, equivocation did not come easy to her. It is only subject races that equivocate naturally, and Viola had always been a ruling power. So—with her instinct for the right thing, which never wholly forsook her even in her maddest, merriest hours—she wisely decided to tell Barbara the truth, and throw herself upon the mercy of this loving and sympathetic kinswoman : and this she did. That is to say, she told the truth as far as she understood it : but her descriptions of her husband—given in all good faith—were very far from the truth indeed. Not unnaturally she painted Hugh as he appeared to her : and it was anything but a lifelike portrait. It was a base libel, an absurd caricature, of the man as he really was : but this of course neither Viola nor her hearer knew.

‘Oh, Viola, how awful—how positively awful!’ exclaimed Barbara when the sad story was finished, throwing her arms round her beautiful cousin and kissing her passionately. Pity was the shortest road to Barbara Lane’s loving heart : and when, as in this case, pity was joined to girlish adoration for physical beauty, she poured out the treasures of her love unstintedly. ‘I cannot think how any man could be so cruel to any one as beautiful as you. He must be a perfect brute!’

Viola admitted that he was. She found this unquestioning sympathy very soothing.

‘I think you did quite right to run away from him,’ continued Barbara : ‘it just serves him right. Nothing would have induced me to stay with a man

like that. And to be so horrid just after your father died, you poor darling, when you were unhappy and needed petting and comforting ! I never knew anything so absolutely beyond the limit for horridness.'

Like her mother, Barbara measured other people's feelings by her own : and (picturing Viola's recent grief as of the same quality as hers) she found Kinfell's depicted indifference to such anguish very black indeed.

'And he hardly ever spoke to me,' said Viola : 'he used to sit and sulk and sulk and sulk till I thought I should scream !'

'How positively sickening of him ! I wonder you didn't actually scream and throw the dinner-plates at his head. It just shows how amiable you are !'

Viola laughed at this. 'Oh ! I couldn't have done that, even if I'd had a devil of a temper, because of the servants. They'd have been so frightfully surprised. I'm a brave woman ; but I don't think that even I dare begin to throw dinner-plates about as long as there were a butler and two footmen standing round and fielding !'

'Then you might have thrown the tea-things,' suggested Barbara : 'there'd have been nobody fielding then.' And, regardless of the seriousness of the problem they were considering, the two cousins laughed merrily. They were still young and light of heart.

'I wonder you married him in the first instance,' remarked Barbara : 'you are so good-looking that you must have had heaps of lovers.'

'Oh ! I had,' replied Viola, with some truth. But even now, young as she was, the number of the men she could have married had begun to swell. To all women this noble army multiplies so steadily as the years go on, that in time it becomes an innumerable host. If every middle-aged woman was correct in

her own estimate of the number of the men she could have married, there would never be any talk of a shortage of man power.

‘He ought to be down on his knees with gratitude to you for having married him,’ continued Barbara : ‘instead of turning out so selfish and horrid.’

‘He was on his knees at first : he certainly was awfully in love with me when we were first married,’ Viola admitted grudgingly.

‘Then that makes it all the worse,’ cried the loyal Barbara : ‘it shows that he is fickle as well as selfish and bad-tempered.’

Viola expanded in this enervating atmosphere : she almost purred aloud, like a cat that is being stroked. But this slavish adulation of Barbara’s was not doing her any good : it was merely strengthening her in her folly.

If a woman must find a safety-valve for her domestic troubles—if such a valve, though unwire and inexpedient, is nevertheless inevitable—let her select for the receptacle of her confidences a feminine not a masculine ear, and a married rather than a single one. The greater safety of a feminine ear is so obvious as, like good wine, to need no bush. As to the advantages of a married ear, a single woman, from the very nature of things, is incapable of seeing men exactly as they are. To her, every man is more or less a hero or a villain, and his dissatisfied wife a martyred saint or a discontented hussy. But the sensible married woman has been that way herself, and knows whereof men are made, and remembers that they are but dust as she is—frequently even more dusty than she. She has outrun the hero-or-villain stage, and understands that men are patchwork affairs made up of scraps of good and scraps of bad mixed up together ; and that it is the business of a wife to fix her eyes upon the good and to ignore the

bad as far as possible : and, above all things, never to nag, even when the inferior bits in the patchwork are too obvious to be overlooked. In that case the wise wife will just once express her opinion upon inferior bits of patchwork in general, and leave it to her partner to apply the point of her remarks. After this manner did the holy women in the old time deal with their unbelieving husbands, and the latter were consequently won by the conversation of their wives ; a conversation, be it noted, neither dictatorial nor punitive—but ‘coupled with fear.’ At least this is the receipt which St. Peter gives for the management of husbands ; and he knew what he was talking about, being himself a married man.

If, therefore, Viola had confided her grievances to a sensible married friend, the latter would first have told her that Kinball was only acting after his kind in being tiresome and irritating according to feminine standards ; and, secondly, that she was a fool to make such a fuss about what all wives have more or less to put up with. In short, Hugh was troublesome because he was a man, and she must put up with him because she was a woman. Probably the sensible married friend would have added a rider to the effect that as no woman is an absolutely perfect wife, no woman has the right to expect an absolutely perfect husband ; and that what is sauce for the gander is likewise sauce for the goose. Viola would not have liked this at all : but it would have done her far more good than Barbara’s indiscriminate condemnation of Hugh, and adulation of Hugh’s disloyal and foolish wife.

But when Viola went on to tell Barbara her plan to hide herself in Merchester, and begged the latter to keep this arrangement a secret even from the Windybanks, Barbara’s native sense came to her aid, and she made a stand.

‘No, no, Viola : that would be a very foolish plan,

It might make your husband think you had run away with some other man.'

'That is just what I should like him to think,' retorted the reckless Viola: 'it would make him so jolly jealous.'

'But, Viola dear, don't you see that it might be so bad for you in the long run? Other people beside Lord Kinfell might think of it; and when once people think things like that about a woman, it takes an awfully long time for them to unthink them again.'

'I don't care what people think. I never have cared, and I'm not going to begin.'

'But you'll have to care sooner or later: every woman has to—and every man too, when it comes to that. Nobody can really afford to be independent either of "what the consequences are" or of "what the world says." I'm dead sure of that.'

'But I want to punish Hugh,' persisted Viola: 'I want to hurt him as much as I can.'

'I quite understand that, darling: but you don't want to hurt yourself even more. I always think it is a great mistake for people to pretend they are worse than they are; and so silly, too. If you come with me to Northbridge because you cannot stand your husband's disagreeableness any longer, you are in the right, and he is in the wrong: but if you give anybody the impression that you have run off with another man, you put yourself in the wrong and Lord Kinfell in the right at once.'

'But I haven't run off with another man,' said Viola.

'Exactly: then why appear as if you had? If you haven't had the fun of running off with another man,' added Barbara naïvely, 'why get the credit of it?'

Viola thought for a moment. 'There is something in that,' she admitted,

Barbara was swift to follow up her advantage : ‘ If you do anything in the least doubtful you are simply playing into your husband’s hands. In fact, as he is such a prig, he would be only too delighted to find you in the wrong, and he ’d sit up on his high horse higher than ever.’ Which remark showed what a very unfaithful description of poor Hugh Viola had given to her cousin. But, as a matter of fact, Viola knew the real Hugh no better than Barbara did.

Barbara continued to urge her point until bit by bit Viola gave way. She thought she was being influenced by Barbara’s arguments : but as a matter of fact it was Barbara herself rather than what Barbara said that was influencing Lady Kinfell. Of all the evils which flesh is heir to, Viola hated dulness the most. It was really nothing but dulness which had goaded her into running away from her home and her husband : it was really the fear of dulness which made her shrink from going to stay with her grandmother and aunt : and now that Barbara had appeared upon the scene, this fear had vanished. So low had Viola been brought by a course of her husband’s undiluted society, that the companionship of a female cousin was a source of positive excitement to her ; and she felt she should really enjoy a visit to Northbridge if Barbara were staying there at the same time. And then, again, Barbara’s open admiration was very acceptable. Viola batted upon admiration : it was a very necessity of her being ; and she had been starved of it for the last few months. The Farquhars—who had been considered by Hugh as suitable visitors to a house of mourning, and so had been invited by him to Ingleham for a visit after Viola’s bereavement—openly disapproved of their cousin’s wife, and took no pains to hide their disapproval : and Hugh had been so puzzled and so wounded by Viola’s attitude towards him, that he

had locked himself up in the fastness of his native reserve, and had not let his wife see how much he still admired her.

Viola's two chief besetments were selfishness and vanity, to a great extent the joint product of her training and her exceptional beauty: but she was neither cursed nor blessed with that doubtful quality which it is the fashion of the present generation to speak of as 'temperament,' and which previous generations never spoke of at all. She had so far generally preferred men to women because as a rule men admired her more than women did: but, given that they offered the same incense at her shrine, the two sexes were fairly equal in her eyes. She liked men well enough: but fundamentally she did not like them any better than women. Therefore the prospect of Barbara's companionship at Northbridge was quite as attractive to Viola as the promised companionship of any young man would have been: which shows her intrinsic innocence—or, as some would say, her inherent coldness.

Moreover she belonged to a generation which has attained to some sense of proportion with regard to the relations of the sexes. To all women of the Victorian era there was, roughly speaking, only one standard of feminine charm; and that was the appeal which it made to masculine taste. If men admired a woman, that woman was dubbed an attractive woman: if men did not admire her, she was voted a dowd or a frump. She might possess every other virtue, every other excellence; but unless she had the cachet of male admiration, she was never considered—even by her own sex—as the possessor of charm. The opinion of the male sex as regards her moral and spiritual attributes did not count for much in other women's eyes: they knew far better than any man whether she was truthful or amiable or kind-hearted or un-

selfish ; on those scores a man's opinion was a matter of no moment : all he knew was whether or no a woman was attractive ; and as he was the only person who did know it all the other women accepted his opinion. Thus it came about, in those Victorian days, that the measure of a woman was to a great extent the measure of the offers of marriage which she had received : they were the different bars of her Distinguished Service Order : but in the phraseology of those prehistoric times they were not called ' bars ' but ' scalps.'

It was this exaltation of masculine taste which made the ballrooms of the last century such heart-searching experiences for shy and sensitive girls. In fact those entertainments bore a distinct resemblance to the Babylonian marriage-markets, and were almost equally trying to some of their victims. A girl was launched into a ballroom : and her reputation for charm for the rest of her life depended upon whether she got plenty of partners or whether she did not. It was the final verdict, and there was no further Court of Appeal. Even the fortunate girls with full programmes were now and again haunted by a vision of how terrible it would be if ever that sacred certificate of merit were to be found a blank : imagination hid no more lurid possibility in its repertoire of nightmares : while as for the poor girls who were doomed to be wall-flowers, their programmes might be innocent of partners' names, but they bore the terrible word *Tekel* scribbled all over them.

But the girls of the new century are not so dependent upon the verdict of men. They are capable of being judged and of judging one another quite apart from any masculine interference. They may—and probably do—enjoy the admiration of men as much as did their mothers and grandmothers before them : but this admiration is not their sole claim to social

recognition : the approval of their fellow-women is also a certificate of accredited charm.

Therefore Viola's vanity urged her to change her plans and accompany her cousin to Northbridge : and her other besetting sin, her selfishness, supported this proposition.

Her anger against Hugh still goaded her to hurt him to the utmost of her power ; but her selfishness was stronger than her malice ; and she felt it was vastly more important to please herself than to punish her husband. So to Barbara's great joy Viola at last consented to go straight to Northbridge : and to conduct her campaign against her egregious husband from under the shelter of her grandmother's wing.

When the two girls had fully discussed their arrangements and made various plans concerning their mutual pleasure during this coming visit to Northbridge, Viola looked at her cousin's wrist-watch and said : ' We are awfully late. If the train doesn't buck up we shall miss our connection, and not get to Northbridge to-night. We ought to be at Merchester by now.'

' I can't see any lights,' said Barbara, staring out of the window : ' but then it is so foggy.' She was right ; the fog, which had lifted in the middle of the day, was coming on again with increased denseness.

' Perhaps there are some on the other side. Let me go and see.' And suiting her action to her words, Viola got up, crossed to the other side of the carriage, and peered out of the window. ' Yes : I do see some very faint twinkles : I believe we are quite near to Merchester now, though it is difficult to make out anything in this horrid fog.'

She had hardly ceased speaking when there was suddenly a strange rocking and shaking, followed by a tremendous crash like the crack of doom. The front part of the train doubled up till it ceased to be

a train any longer, but was transformed into a hideous mass of broken wood, shattered glass, and crushed human bodies. Shrieks rent the frosty air ; and the wintry dusk was illumined with lurid tongues of flame, from the wrecked and already burning carriages. Through some terrible mistake—occasioned no doubt by the fog—the London express had run straight into a luggage-train on the same set of rails. The engine of the express and the first coaches were telescoped into one another ; and the carriages were immediately set on fire by the engine's furnace, as they lay together—heaped on to the top of one another—in hopeless confusion.

Pandemonium seemed suddenly to have been let loose in that peaceful Midland scene ; while Pain and Death came riding along on the wings of the wind. Terrible were the sounds, and still more terrible the sights, in the ghastly holocaust : but Viola and Barbara knew nothing of these horrors. They were lying calm and still and quite unconscious underneath the ruins of one of the burning carriages.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II

BANDS

CHAPTER I

IN HOSPITAL

‘So you really think that my niece is going to recover, Dr. Culpepper? You believe she will live?’

The speaker was Miss Caroline Windybank, the scene a waiting-room in the Mercheater Hospital, and the time two months after the terrible railway accident on the outskirts of Mercheater, wherein twenty passengers had been killed and more than fifty injured.

The greatest surgeon in the Midlands offered a chair to Miss Windybank, and sat down opposite to her on the other side of the gas-fire, which continued to wheeze to itself in the accustomed manner of gas-fires, as if there was something seriously wrong with its chest.

‘I am very glad to have this opportunity of a conversation with you, Miss Windybank,’ Dr. Culpepper began: ‘I have been wanting it for several days, but your visits and mine to the Hospital never coincided; and I have been so rushed lately that most of my good intentions have been unfulfilled. Yes, I think I may now safely say that Miss Lane is going to recover. And by that I do not mean only that her life will be spared—which for many weeks seemed doubtful: I also mean that she will gradually recover her health and her powers, and not spend her days in the chronic invalidism which at one time seemed the only alternative to her death.’

Miss Windybank heaved a sigh of relief. ‘Oh,

Dr. Culpepper, you don't know how thankful I am to hear you say that! Of course the dear child's death would have been a great sorrow to us: but I think it would even have been a greater one to see her reduced to permanent invalidism. It's bad enough for the old to be invalids: but it's simply hell upon earth for the young! And Barbara isn't yet turned twenty-one.' And Caroline's moss-agate eyes were suffused with tears. She did not often cry; but her niece's terrible accident when the latter was on her way to Northbridge, and the long and dangerous illness which followed it, had shaken Miss Windybank more than she knew. It had been awful to her—who had, through all her five-and-forty years, experienced nothing but superb health—to stand by the narrow bed in a private ward of Merchester Hospital, and look at the maimed and battered and disfigured thing which had so lately been a bright young girl; and to realise that this unconscious cinder of humanity was her own niece, her sister's child.

At first Caroline had almost prayed that Barbara might die: it seemed so terrible to live after one was disfigured as she was, and especially if one was a woman: but when Caroline saw her mother's anguish lest this beloved grandchild should be once more taken from her—the grandchild for whom she had so longed, and for whom she had made such loving preparations—Miss Windybank relented, and prayed, if only for her mother's sake, that her niece's life might be spared.

When they were all girls at home together, Julia and Lucy used to say that Caroline regarded the rest of the family as furniture provided for her mother's pleasure or convenience: with her, her mother was first, and all the rest nowhere: and this was very much Caroline's attitude now. If Mrs. Windybank

wanted Barbara to live, Barbara must live, even if her life should prove one long torture of ill-health and disfigurement. Mrs. Windybank was the first consideration—or ought to be—even with Providence : but Caroline was far from indifferent to Barbara's sufferings, and therefore her eyes filled with tears of joy when she heard Dr. Culpepper's verdict.

'It is a wonderful recovery,' he continued. 'For some weeks, as you know, I had very little hope for her myself : but now I believe—I think that humanly speaking I may say I am sure—that Miss Lane will eventually entirely throw off the results of her accident, and be as strong physically as she was before it. I see no reason now—none at all—why her health should permanently suffer. Had she been ten years older, or had she been endowed with a less vigorous constitution, it would have been a different thing : but at twenty-one can get over almost anything. Ah, Miss Windybank, what a thing it is to be young !'

'But what about her disfigurement ; what about her poor hurt face ? Do you think she will ever be fit to be seen again ?' And once more Caroline's eyes filled with tears at the thought of the future that lay before Barbara. From permanent invalidism the girl was saved : but was permanent disfigurement any easier to bear ? The handsome Miss Windybank doubted it.

'Again the advantage—the unparalleled advantage—of youth comes in,' replied the doctor : 'I firmly believe that in time Miss Lane's disfigurement will disappear : but it will take time. You see, the poor young lady's face was hit and cut before it was burned : hit, I conclude, by the smashing of the compartment, and cut by the broken glass—so that her nose and mouth and chin were badly battered. But they are gradually resuming their normal shape, and the scars of the burn will disappear in time. As a matter of

fact, the burns though extensive were not very deep. Her poor face was terribly blistered, but they were surface blisters. The injuries to her face caused by the falling débris were really far more serious than the burns ; but even they are yielding to treatment. She will probably never have quite as delicate a complexion as she had before—perhaps never be quite as pretty as she once was—but I am sure that there will not permanently be any actual disfigurement.’

‘She never was pretty,’ blurted out the always truthful Caroline ; ‘so having no beauty she could not lose it. But as a child she had a lovely complexion.’

‘I am afraid it may never be quite so lovely again : even though the scars will disappear, the skin will permanently be slightly coarsened and thickened : but mercifully her eyes are unhurt, and her beautiful hair is not damaged. I fancy her hat must have saved it.’

These details were new to Miss Windybank : though she had constantly visited her niece since the railway accident, she had never seen the patient except swathed in bandages. ‘Barbara always had beautiful hair,’ she said.

‘It is evidently a family characteristic,’ remarked Dr. Culpepper, bowing gallantly to his *vis-à-vis*. Then he added, ‘I wonder if Miss Lane was alone, or whether there was anybody in the carriage with her ; though I suppose that is one of the things that we shall never find out—at any rate as long as your niece is in her present condition.’

‘I can tell you that, Dr. Culpepper. I saw the young man who rescued Barbara from the burning carriage ; his name is Timpany, and he lives in Merchester ; and as he happened to call to inquire after her one day when I was here, the Matron thought I should like to see him and thank him. Which I

most gratefully did. He told me that there was a woman on the other side of the carriage, quite dead when he found them, and practically burned to a cinder ; so terribly burned that he said one could hardly see that she was a woman at all. If Barbara had been on the side of the carriage which caught fire first, she would have met the same fate.' And Miss Windybank shuddered.

'I know some of the Timpanys,' said Dr. Culpepper : 'the father is a wealthy manufacturer in these parts, and there are several sons, and some pretty daughters. A thoroughly nice, well-brought-up family.' Then he added : 'Had young Timpany any idea who the poor creature was who was taken when your niece was left ?'

'None at all : he said that she was never identified. She couldn't have been identified by her face or clothing as she was so terribly burned ; and no luggage was found that seemed to belong to her,' replied Miss Windybank, little guessing who that poor dead girl had really been.

'Poor thing, poor thing ! Now you mention it I remember there were one or two victims of that terrible accident who never were identified. It is impossible to identify bodies when they are so fearfully mutilated, unless they have something about them giving a name or address : or unless friends and relations knew they were travelling by the smashed train, and make inquiries about them.'

'So Mr. Timpany told me. He felt an interest in Barbara and her fellow-traveller because he was the first to go to their rescue. He found out who Barbara was from the name and address on a china label which was attached to her smouldering bundle of rugs. But nobody could find anything belonging to the other passenger. Probably everything she had was burned.'

'And was there no mark on her linen ?'

Miss Windybank shuddered. 'There was no linen left, the young man told me : it was burned to a cinder.'

Dr. Culpepper was silent for a moment, while the gas-fire wheezed uninterruptedly : then he asked, 'I suppose Miss Lane can give you no information as to her fellow-traveller ?'

Miss Windybank shook her head. 'No : she is still absolutely without any recollection of anything that happened before her accident. Her memory remains a perfect blank.'

'That is really what I wanted to talk to you about—why I asked you to meet me here this morning. As I have already said, I think I can now promise you that my patient will regain her normal health and strength, and that in time she will practically lose all disfigurement : but, alas ! I do not at present see my way to promise you that she will ever regain her memory. It is that which is puzzling and worrying me. Far more serious than the effect of either the burns or the other physical injuries has been the effect of the nervous shock. It is that which has kept her ill for so long, as her facial injuries are now merely local ones. As for her body, although her clothes had caught fire when she was rescued, her rescuers had time to put out the flames before they had done any permanent mischief. There again the burns were only on the surface. But the effects of a nervous shock such as this it is impossible to estimate.'

'Yet she seems all right in her head—apart from her memory, I mean,' remarked Miss Windybank bluntly.

'Absolutely right—and has been so, ever since she properly regained consciousness. It is not an uncommon event for a shock such as Miss Lane has had to result in total loss of memory ; and also it is possible that the injuries she received on her head may in some way have touched the brain.'

‘Do you think there is any fear of her going mad?’ asked Miss Windybank still more bluntly.

The doctor reassured her at once. ‘Not the slightest—not the very slightest: you may set your mind entirely at rest on that score. It is only her memory that is affected. And that may be restored to her in time: I cannot say that it won’t; but on the other hand I cannot say that it will.’

Caroline was silent for a minute. Then she exclaimed, ‘How dreadful! How very dreadful!’

‘Not as dreadful as it might have been,’ replied Dr. Culpepper soothingly: ‘it is better for Miss Lane to lose her memory than to lose her mind or her sight, or to be permanently disfigured—all of which were quite possible results from such a ghastly accident as hers. After all it isn’t as if she had her life behind her; there is not so much to remember in twenty years—the first five of which she couldn’t remember anyhow,’ continued the doctor, little dreaming how her forgetfulness of her fellow-passenger on that fatal journey was to cast its shadow over the girl’s future life.

‘That is quite true,’ replied Caroline Windybank, in similar ignorance of what Fate held in store for the invalid: ‘Barbara’s life is before her—not behind, like yours and mine. It would be dreadful to lose one’s memory at forty: there wouldn’t be time to collect enough experience for the cud-chewing of one’s old age. But at twenty one hasn’t so much cud to chew.’

The doctor smiled. ‘A most sensible way of looking at the matter, Miss Windybank. And now I will tell you what I want you to do. The poor child is chafing against her loss of memory, and is exhausting her brain with trying to remember what it is impossible for her to recall—at any rate for the present: and I want you to tell her as much as you

can about her past life, and to tell it so vividly that she will almost come to feel that she does remember it.'

Caroline's quick mind grasped the idea at once. 'I see. You want me to make up a sort of false memory for her, as people have false noses, and cork legs ; so that in time she will hardly know it from the real one.'

'Precisely. As you will probably know from experience we often think that we remember events in our childhood which we really only know about from the descriptions of our elders. *We* cannot recall scenes at which we were present in the earliest days of our childhood : but we have so often heard these scenes described by our parents that we *believe* that we remember them ourselves. Take also the historic instance of George the Fourth, who had heard and talked so much about the Battle of Waterloo that he ended by believing that he had been there himself. And this is what I want you to do with your niece : I want you so to describe and dwell upon her past, that she will gradually come to believe that she does remember it, even if she doesn't ; and then she will not only be happier in her mind (and happiness, let me tell you, is a great factor in the restoration of health, especially in the case of the young), but she will also cease to exhaust her brain in making vain endeavours to recall the past.'

'That I will certainly try to do, Dr. Culpepper : in fact I have already been doing it in order to find something to talk about to the poor child. I've already told her all about her father and mother and brother ; and even about her only cousin, my late sister Julia's daughter, whom Barbara played with as a child, and whom none of us have seen since—nor wanted to see.' Miss Windybank was still sore over the Chalfonts' treatment of her mother ; she did

not care an atom how they treated herself. 'But what renders it difficult is that I know none of the details of Barbara's recent life. I know all the details of her childhood, but, that is some time ago : and for the last ten years she has been living in New Zealand, and I have been living in Salopshire.'

The doctor was silent for some minutes, drumming with his fingers upon his knee : then he said, 'This certainly augments the difficulties of the case : I cannot help feeling that it would be easier for her now—and would increase the chances of her regaining her lost memory—if she could take up the thread of her life exactly where she left it off, amid the same surroundings, in the same circumstances, and among the same people. For the moment I had forgotten—though of course I was aware of the fact—that Miss Lane was on her way from New Zealand to Northbridge when the accident happened. Still,' he added more cheerfully, 'difficulties are only spurs to fresh endeavours—especially if one happens to be a doctor—and we must try all the harder to surmount them. You must talk to her about her own people and her father's house, until she believes that she remembers them.'

'I will do my best,' said Caroline.

'I recall that you told me some weeks ago that my patient is a daughter of William Lane of Northbridge. I knew him well years ago. He and I were medical students together. And now he is dead, I hear?'

'Yes : he died a few months ago : and it was because Barbara fretted so much about her father's death that my sister decided to send her to England for a thorough change.'

Dr. Culpepper's face grew very tender : 'Poor child, poor child ! What an experience to come all this way for—a thorough change indeed ! Are there any other children ?'

‘One son, older than Barbara, who has succeeded to poor William’s practice; and is, I hear, a very promising young man.’

‘Is your sister, Mrs. Lane, still living? You must forgive my curiosity, Miss Windybank, but I feel a special interest in your niece, both for her father’s sake and also on account of all that she has gone through.’

‘And it is very kind of you to feel it,’ replied Caroline heartily. ‘Oh yes, my sister is alive and well, I am thankful to say.’

Dr. Culpepper’s eyes grew misty with remembrance. ‘She was a lovely creature when she was young—a very lovely creature. I remember meeting her at a ball in Silverhampton just before her marriage, and thinking what a lucky dog Lane was. Her daughter inherited her mother’s colouring, though you tell me not her mother’s beauty. But perhaps that is a good thing, as she would only have had it to lose it: and I should imagine that it is far worse for a good-looking woman to be disfigured than for a plain one.’

Caroline agreed with this opinion. ‘I don’t know what Barbara’s mother would have done if she had lost her beauty: she always thought a lot of it.’

‘She would have been obliged, as her poor daughter is, to endure her misfortune and to make the best of it: but I repeat I think that in her case the loss would have been greater.’

‘Mrs. Lane was never the one to make the best of anything,’ remarked Miss Windybank: ‘so I only hope her daughter doesn’t take after her in that respect, as she does in eyes and hair.’

‘And I hope so, too,’ said Dr. Culpepper, rising from his seat beside the wheezing fire. ‘Besides, life is fuller for girls now than it was in our young days, and so they have more to do than just to enjoy themselves and look pretty. I think in a few weeks we

shall be able to move your niece to Northbridge; and I am full of hopes that the sight of a place that she knew when she was a child may help to awaken her dormant memory. If we could transplant her to her home in New Zealand, I should have greater hopes still: but that is out of the question.'

Miss Windybank had risen too. 'Thank you so much for all your kindness to Barbara, Dr. Culpepper. It is to you that she owes her life,' she said, holding out her hand.

The doctor grasped and shook it. 'I hope Miss Lane will increase her debt, and owe me her restored health and strength and memory as well: but in those matters I must take Time as my partner, and leave the ease principally to him.'

And with that the doctor started off on his long rounds, and Caroline went up to the private ward where her niece had lain ever since the Merchester railway accident.

'Is that you, Auntie Car?' asked a faint voice from the mummy-like figure on the bed: nothing of the patient was visible except her copper hair and her grey-green eyes which showed over the top of the bandages. It was the lower part of her face that had suffered so terribly: the eyes and forehead were untouched.

'Yes, darling,' replied Caroline, sitting down by the bed and laying a cool hand on the girl's smooth forehead. 'I have been having a long talk with our dear old Culpepper, or I should have come up to you before: and he assures me that you are getting on so fast that in two or three weeks I shall be able to take you back with me to Northbridge.' Miss Windybank was one of those sensible persons who never make secrets or mysteries in dealing with invalids.

The moss-agate eyes brightened. 'Oh, that will be lovely—to go to Northbridge, and stay with you

and Granny ! I'm so tired of this horrid, dull, little room.'

'Of course you are, my dear ! Anybody would be, with such a wall-paper as this. .But Granny has got a lovely room for you at home, the room your mother used to have when she was a girl : and Granny has had it all done up with rosebuds and goodness knows what, in your honour.' For the first time Caroline felt that the money spent on the pink carpet and the rose-covered chintz had not been wasted : nothing was too good for this dear child who had suffered so terribly.

'Tell me more about Mother. I am never tired of hearing about her, though I do wish I could remember her for myself.'

'Oh ! you 'll remember her right enough when you are well again,' replied Caroline cheerfully, giving a very free translation indeed to Dr. Culpepper's faint hope. But she thought it best to do so : and what Miss Windybank thought it best to do, that she did, regardless of other people's advice or opinions. 'The doctor has only just been telling me that he is sure that you will get perfectly well and strong—as strong as you have ever been in your life. And also that in time you will quite lose all the disfigurement left by your accident : that in a year or so there will be no scars left at all.' Miss Windybank knew where the shoe was most likely to pinch.

'Oh ! Auntie, did he really say that—that I shouldn't always be disfigured ?' The curiosity in the eyes above the bandages was pathetic in the intensity.

'He did, my dear. He assured me that in time there would not be the slightest trace left of the scars on your face. But he said that it would take time, and that it would require a good deal of patience on your part. You mustn't be in a hurry.'

‘I won’t, I won’t. I don’t mind how long I wait if only I can have a decent face again some time. Of course I hate not being able to remember anything—it makes me feel such an idiot ; but I don’t mind that half as much as the disfigurement.’

‘Don’t you worry about that, my dear Barbara : that will come all right in time—Dr. Culpepper assures me that it will—and you will be as good-looking as you ever were : not that you ever were what one would call really good-looking’—in Miss Windybank’s conversation the truth, like murder, would out—‘but you were quite passable and pleasant-looking ; and passable and pleasant-looking you will be again. And surely that is as much as any girl can want,’ added Aunt Caroline, who in her youth had wanted a great deal more : and had got it.

‘But Mother was pretty, you say ?’ asked Barbara, who never grew tired of hearing about her own family.

‘As pretty as paint, and so was your Aunt Julia, and so is your cousin Viola : but I don’t know that they were any the better for it.’

‘And you must have been very good-looking too ; you are awfully handsome even now,’ said the girl, who was still young enough to feel—and even to show—surprise that any one over forty should retain any atom of looks.

Miss Windybank shrugged her shoulders. ‘Oh ! I was handsome enough in my time : but I don’t know that I was any the better for it, either. Still, I dare say I enjoyed it while it lasted. But if you haven’t inherited the Windybank beauty, my dear, you may thank your stars that you have inherited the Windybank constitution. If you hadn’t, you never could have got over this terrible accident as you are doing.’

‘Then are all the Windybanks strong ?’

‘Your mother and I have always had splendid health, though it pleased her for people to think her rather delicate. But she was always as strong as a horse, though she never looked it. And your grandfather had a magnificent constitution, but he undermined it by his foolishness. Your Aunt Julia was the least strong of us : but she ’d have been all right if she hadn’t married that tiresome fool, Charlie Chalfont. He simply wore her out with his bad-temper and extravagance, till she couldn’t stand him any longer, but died to get rid of him. The only way in those days of getting rid of a tiresome husband !’

Had Barbara been in possession of her memory she would have said that history repeated itself, and that Aunt Julia’s daughter had been equally unfortunate in her choice of a husband : but Lady Kinfell’s plight—like everything else that had happened before the railway accident—was completely obliterated from her mind. She had no more recollection of her meeting with her cousin than she had of the rest of her life up to that time. Everything was a blank.

‘Tell me more about all my relations, please, Aunt Caroline,’ begged Barbara, nestling her poor scarred form among the soft pillows, and preparing to enjoy the only pleasure that was possible to her in those sad days.

And Aunt Caroline replied with a will, and brought out of the treasure-house of her memory things new and old wherewith to regale her suffering niece.

‘You do tell things well,’ remarked the girl during a pause in the recital : ‘you make everything seem so real that I almost feel as if I could remember it for myself, though I know I can’t.’

Caroline’s heart leaped for joy. This was just what the doctor desired in order to hasten Barbara’s recovery.

The invalid had already learned to love her cheerful

and entertaining aunt ; but she had learned to love her gentle and tender grandmother still more. It was a fortnight after her accident before Barbara properly recovered consciousness ; and during that time only Miss Windybank visited the private ward in Merchester Hospital, where her niece lay hovering between life and death. There was no use in harassing her mother, she felt, by allowing her to see the unconscious figure that lay like a mummy in its wrappings. But after Barbara recovered consciousness, wild horses could not have kept Mrs. Windybank from her granddaughter's side. She did not come as constantly as Caroline did : she was not strong enough : but once or twice during those dreadful weeks the mother and daughter stayed for a few days in an hotel not far from the Hospital, and then Mrs. Windybank spent her whole time with Barbara. To Caroline's surprise, her mother was not as much upset by Barbara's condition as she was : Mrs. Windybank—having been always more or less a delicate woman herself—had none of the instinctive shrinking from illness which her robust daughter had ; and also she had learned—as her daughters never could learn—to accept the inevitable and to submit to it patiently. There was a good deal of the rebel in the Windybank blood, which unfortunately had gone on to the next generation : but Mrs. Windybank was numbered among the meek, who, we are told, shall one day inherit the earth.

But much as they loved her, and deeply as they sympathised with her sufferings, neither Mrs. Windybank nor Caroline had any idea of the misery which the poor girl had endured during her sojourn in the Hospital. First, there was the physical anguish, which in itself was terrible enough : but in addition to that, there was mental distress almost too poignant to be endured. As Dr. Culpepper had said, although

Barbara had entirely lost her memory, the rest of her mind was as clear and acute as it had ever been : and, as she began to recover, she gradually came to realise the enormity of the misfortune which had befallen her. Although her conscious memory was dormant, her subliminal mind retained the impressions of the past ; and she knew—though she could not have told how she knew—that the disfigurement caused by her accident was a terrible misfortune for any girl to have to bear ; and she was excruciatingly sensitive about it. Also she was oppressed by that agonising feeling of humiliation which certain natures experience when they are utterly dependent upon the ministrations of others.

Some people are rather proud of ill-health : they talk of an enfeebled digestion or an inefficient lung as if these disabilities were in some way patents of nobility. In their inmost souls they paraphrase the poet's words and say :

‘ Weak hearts are more than coronets,
And lack of tone than Norman blood.’

The worse they are, the more important they consider themselves ; and woe betide any well-meaning friend who—with a mistaken application of the Golden Rule—tries to cheer them up by telling them how much better they are looking ! To say this is to jeopardise their sole claim to consideration ; to think it is to deny their divine right of invalids. But there are other people to whom sickness, instead of being a distinction, is a disgrace : who are as much ashamed of being ill as they would be of being imbecile. Probably these are the stronger and the finer natures : but they are undoubtedly those to whom bodily infirmity is the most difficult to bear : for in their case physical suffering is augmented by mental humiliation. It is such as these—and such as these alone—

who understand something of what S. Paul must have endured. Before he groaned within himself waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of the body.

It might have been because her subconscious memory recalled the superb health she had enjoyed up to the time of her accident—or it might have been because she resembled her aunt in shrinking instinctively from all the ills of the flesh—but anyway the fact remained that Barbara was one of those to whom all bodily infirmity seemed a humiliation and a disgrace : and the poor girl suffered accordingly.

Therefore her aunt appeared as an angel of light when she brought the doctor's message as to his certainty of Barbara's complete recovery, and of the ultimate disappearance of all disfigurement. At these words the girl's heart sang for very joy.

It is true that she did chafe also at the loss of her memory, but not as much as Dr. Culpepper imagined. With a feminine instinct which arrived at the same point as the doctor's well-reasoned conclusions but considerably sooner, Miss Windybank had already done all in her power to assist her niece's memory by describing to the girl much that she would normally have remembered for herself ; and she had already succeeded in convincing Barbara that there had not been in her short life much worth remembering. Naturally the girl grieved that she had no recollections of her parents and her brother : but—as Miss Windybank pointed out with her unfailing common-sense—to remember her father would only reawaken her sorrow at his death, which so far the results of the accident had suspended : and as for her mother and brother, she would be going back home in a year or two, and then she could renew her knowledge of them direct. And Caroline added, what both the doctor and the nurses now firmly believed, that this return home, to her accustomed haunts, would finally restore

Barbara's lost memory, even if it had not come back of itself before then.

Although the girl's mind did not remember the past, her body remembered it, and was thrilled with the unconscious joy of convalescence: that purely physical delight—akin to the joy of the trees in spring-time, as the sap begins once more to course through their leafless branches—which we all feel when the tide of renewed life and health begins once more to course through our veins after a long illness. As she grew gradually stronger, this physical joy increased: until, in spite of her scars and her bandages and her utter forgetfulness of the past, Barbara was as much looking forward to the prospect of going to North-bridge, as a schoolboy looks forward to the prospect of going home for the holidays.

CHAPTER II

THE FORSAKEN HUSBAND

It is to be presumed that however unemotional and phlegmatic a man may be, the receipt of a letter telling him that his wife has run away is always more or less of a shock.

A man may have drifted apart from his wife ; he may be peevish with her, and she may nag at him ; he may think that she flirts too much with other men ; he may be conscious that his own conduct is not immaculate and that he has given her just cause for offence : he may be jealous of her relations or resentful by reason of what he considers her want of regard for him ; but it rarely occurs to him that she may kick over the traces and leave him.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Lord Kinfell, on his return to Eldhurst House from his duties at Woolwich, on finding Viola's curt and insolently contemptuous letter (which had just arrived by the afternoon post), was, to use his own expression, completely bowled over.

He could hardly believe his eyes : yet the words were plain enough. 'I simply cannot live with you any longer. Nobody could.' What did it all mean ? Why could she no longer live with him ? Had he not done everything he could to make her happy ? Hugh had no thought of the rank he had given her, of the wealth wherewith he had endowed her. He was no snob. But he did remember the love he had lavished upon her, the pride he had taken in her

beauty, the devotion which had led him to humour her every whim, to anticipate her slightest wish. He had given to her of his best, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over—and this was the result ! And the reason of it all ? He was ‘dull and boring and tiresome.’ Hugh humbly acknowledged that he *was* dull, he *was* boring. But was that a reason for his wife to leave him ? Had she not vowed to love and honour him—at the moment he laid no stress on ~~the~~ ‘obey’—for better, for worse ? Hugh could not understand it at all.

For the moment he was stunned : his whole world seemed suddenly to have collapsed. Such a catastrophe had never so much as entered his head. It could not be : the whole horrid thing must be a practical joke on Viola’s part—a very questionable kind of joke, one hardly in good taste, if a practical joke can be ever so described. But no : Viola might make fun of him in word—she frequently had so done—but no one could imagine her playing off a practical joke even upon a dull and boring husband. Again he said to himself, the whole thing could not be, it was a horrid nightmare. But there was the letter, there were the cruel words, there was the deadly insult.

He roused himself—the thing was true, it must be faced. He must act. Viola had gone—she must be brought back again as quickly as possible, and with as little scandal as possible. The whole thing must be hushed up : his wife’s good name must be saved. Yes, that was the main thing. What did his own sufferings matter, if his wife’s good name could be saved ?

It is to the everlasting credit of Kinfell that he never doubted Viola. Probably most men, faced with such a letter, would have jumped to the conclusion that his wife had gone off with another man :

and the first question he would have asked himself would have been, 'Who is the scoundrel?' But Kinfell had complete confidence in his wife's honour. Foolish she might be, reckless she might be, cruel and indifferent she might be, but faithless she could never be. She might hold in slight esteem her vow to love and cherish her husband, she might scoff at the idea of obeying him, she might, nay had, run away from him—but she would not fly to another man's arms. With all her frivolity, with all her love of admiration, with all her reckless indifference to the claims of a husband, there was a certain cold pride about Viola which made it certain that she was not one to play fast and loose with her honour.

No, she must be brought back : but how ? Hugh read her letter for the twentieth time : ' I am off to Paris to have a really good time '—yes, that was just like Viola ! She wanted a good time : she could not get the good time she wanted, owing, she said, to the ' fussiness ' of her husband : so she had rushed off to Paris, never realising in her foolish recklessness the construction the world would place on her action. Yes, she must be brought back before the world knew of her escapade, before malicious and censorious tongues began to wag.

The first thing to be done was to return to Ingleham, and find out from the servants when and how Viola had left the Moat. The car was ordered round and Hugh reached Ingleham in a short time, after displaying a regrettable disregard of the regulations promulgated by authority for safeguarding the lives and limbs of His Majesty's subjects, who proceed upon his highway on their lawful occasions.

The butler was very much astonished at the return of his master ; but, as became a well-trained servant, no trace of his surprise was visible on his countenance.

' Where is her ladyship ? ' asked Kinfell abruptly.

A faint hope still animated him that after all the letter was a joke, and that he would find Viola safe at home.

‘Her ladyship left the Moat soon after your lordship, this morning,’ replied the butler.

‘And she has not returned?’

‘I do not think her ladyship intended to return to-day, my lord. Leastways she took with her a week-end case, and as she got into the car she said that she should not be back to-night.’

‘Did she say anything else?’

‘Only that your lordship’s letters were to be forwarded to Eldhurst: and that her ladyship’s were to await her return.’

‘Where did the car take her?’

‘To Sevenash station, my lord: and Frederick took a ticket for her to Folkestone,’ replied Gittens, who became more and more astonished as the cross-examination proceeded.

‘Send Bevan to me,’ said Kinfell curtly.

Viola’s maid quickly made her appearance. This discreet damsel had already scented a mystery. Her curiosity had naturally been aroused by Lady Kinfell’s extraordinary departure. When a lady, who is usually accompanied by her maid and a vast amount of luggage, departs without any warning and takes with her a new and unlabelled week-end case, packs for herself, and leaves even her dressing-bag behind her, the most unsuspicious of maids will jump to the conclusion that there is something in the wind. And Bevan, albeit the discreetest of maids, was by no means unsuspicious. It was therefore with alacrity that she obeyed Lord Kinfell’s summons—all agog to discover anything which might throw light on the mystery.

‘When her ladyship went out this morning, did she say where she was going?’ asked Kinfell.

‘No, my lord : she said she did not think she should be back to-night. That was all.’

‘I understand from Gittens that she did not take much luggage?’ .

‘My lady only took with her a week-end case,’ replied Bevan.

‘What did it contain?’

‘I beg your pardon, my lord, but I did not pack the case. It was already fastened up, when her ladyship told me to have it put into the car.’

‘Then who packed the case? That is your work, surely,’ said Kinfell.

‘It is certainly my duty to pack for her ladyship. But I did not know that she was going away, and I received no instructions as to packing. I presume that my lady must have done so herself,’ replied Bevan.

‘Then you have no idea what her ladyship took with her?’

‘Well, my lord, I cannot say I have no idea,’ replied Bevan demurely: ‘the fact is that her ladyship recently purchased some new clothes, and also the week-end case she has taken with her. I noticed that the clothes were unmarked; and as they are no longer here, I presume that her ladyship packed them into the case. She has not taken with her either her jewel-case or her dressing-bag.’

‘That will do,’ said Hugh curtly, ‘you may go. Stay,’ he added, ‘you are not to say a word of what you have told me, to any one. You understand? I have no doubt her ladyship will return to-morrow.’

‘You may trust me, my lord,’ replied the discreet maid.

So Bevan went, having ascertained little save the fact that Lord Kinfell seemed very much put out, and that evidently there was something seriously wrong—that the relations between her master and

mistress were even more strained than even her quick wit had imagined.

Lord Kinfell *was* put out : more than that, he was seriously alarmed. This could be no practical joke on the part of his misguided wife. Viola had evidently planned the whole matter with care. She had taken with her just what was sufficient for the night when she reached Paris : she had apparently taken nothing with her that could betray her identity or even her rank to the eyes of hotel-managers or prying chamber-maids : she had plenty of money, and could easily replenish her wardrobe in Paris. Yes, she intended to have the 'good time' she spoke of in her letter. Well, there was only one thing to be done. He must follow her to Paris. Despite her elaborate precautions he would have little difficulty in finding her in Paris. He did not suppose that Viola, with her love of comfort and luxury, would go to any but a first-rate hotel. In any case her appearance was so striking that she could hardly remain unrecognised when once inquiries as to her whereabouts were started.

Then when he had found her he would have little difficulty—so he thought in his ignorance of Viola's character, and in his masculine reliance on common-sense (as if common-sense ever influenced a woman where her desires or her prejudices were in question)—in showing her the compromising situation into which her heedlessness and recklessness had beguiled her, and in persuading her to return at once to the Moat.

It was too late to do anything more that night. There was no sleep for Hugh. Half the night he paced up and down the library, trying to discern a way of extricating Viola from the compromising situation in which she had placed herself. He might—he had no doubt he would—discover her whereabouts in

Paris, and bring her home. But how to account for her actions to the servants? Of course that maid of hers suspected something. It was all very well to tell her to hold her tongue, but tongues require a good deal of holding. Hugh had little confidence in Bevan's assurance of discretion. It would have been wiser, perhaps, if he had not returned to the Moat. Of course his inquiries would set tongues a-wagging. He would have done well to have taken Viola's letter at its face-value, and gone straight to Paris.

The next morning Hugh telephoned to his Major for leave of absence on the ground of urgent private business. His application was immediately granted, and he lost no time in starting for Paris. As he sat in the train, he read of a terrible railway accident in the Midlands: but his mind was so full of Viola that he cast but a cursory glance over the dreadful details—little thinking how much that accident meant to him, or what an effect it would have upon his future life.

On reaching Paris, Hugh went straight to the hotel where he was accustomed to put up, and where Viola had accompanied him when they had run over for a few days after their marriage. But neither there, nor at any other of the principal hotels, did he find Viola: nor in spite of persistent inquiries could he discover a trace of her anywhere. At the Gare du Nord no one remembered having seen a lady answering to Viola's description travelling alone, arriving by the train she would have been in if she had proceeded direct to Paris.

Paris having failed him, Hugh returned to Folkestone, but again he was baffled. No porter had seen Viola alight from the train, or had conveyed a suitcase for a lady to the boat.

Kinfell then returned to Sevenash: and there he found that Frederick had been accurate in his state-

ments. The station-master had seen Lady Kinfell put into a first-class carriage of the Folkestone train.

Hugh was thus brought back to the point from which he had started. The only definite fact on which he could rely was that Viola had started for Folkestone apparently *en route* for Paris, as she had stated in her letter.

Kinfell was completely baffled, and returned to Ingleham to consider what the next step should be. As he considered the matter, he came to the conclusion that Viola must have carried out her original intentions. After all, there were a good many handsome women in this world, and it was quite possible that she had carried her own suit-case on board the boat: and when she alighted in Paris railway porters were not infallible, so that it was quite possible that she might have reached her destination without attracting attention. Indeed it was on the cards that she had employed porters, and had paid them heavily to secure their silence. Porters never object to a substantial tip. They would draw their own conclusions, no doubt: but it was no uncommon thing for a good-looking woman to desire to cross from Folkestone to Boulogne without advertising the fact to the world at large.

It is, perhaps, strange that Kinfell had no inkling of the true facts of the case. But Viola's alleged desire of having a good time in Paris had taken such a hold of him that it never so much as crossed his mind that she had remained in England all the time. If he had consulted a Bradshaw, or had asked the station-master at Sevenash, he would have discovered that the train by which she travelled stopped more than once before it reached Folkestone, and that nothing was easier than for her to get out, and return on her tracks. But Kinfell was no Sherlock Holmes: at Sevenash all that he did was to confirm the account

of Viola's movements which he had obtained from the footman.

Of course all hope of concealing his wife's indiscretion from the world at large had vanished from Kinfell's mind. To the servants in particular the hard facts of the case were as plain as a pikestaff. To the imperturbable Gittens it was as evident as to the discreet Bevan that her ladyship had run away—'made a bolt of it' was the expression used by Frederick, only to receive a severe rebuke from the stately butler for using low language. What was the common talk of the housekeeper's room and the servants' hall quickly became the property of the village. And much sympathy was kindly if rudely expressed with his lordship, who was well liked by his servants and by the villagers whom he always treated as human beings even if they were his dependents; whereas Viola's haughty indifference to their feelings was not conducive to popularity.

The official explanation given by Kinfell was that her ladyship had been suddenly called away by the illness of a relative: but the official explanation was received with the same polite incredulity that similar official explanations from the Treasury Bench obtain among His Majesty's Opposition.

But the official explanation which Kinfell had felt bound to give of his wife's departure started a new idea in his mind. Did Viola's relatives know anything of her departure? It seemed most unlikely. She had separated herself from her own people: she had improved on the injunction of the Psalmist, by forgetting not only her father's house but also her mother's. She had indeed at her father's request invited her grandmother and her aunt to her wedding: but after their refusal to attend the ceremony, no further communication had passed between her and

her mother's family. She had left it to her husband even to inform them of her father's death.

Still it was possible that the Windybanks knew more than he did of Viola's friends before her marriage. He knew that before her marriage she had had a large circle of friends, though she had dropped most of them on becoming Lady Kinfell : and those numerous acquaintances whom she had made since her marriage were hardly intimate enough to be confidantes. It might be that among her earlier friends there was some one in whom Viola would confide. If he could only find such a person, he might obtain a clue to his wife's hiding-place. For that she was in hiding, Hugh had now no manner of doubt.

That the Windybanks might be able to help him in his extremity was certainly highly improbable, but it was possible : and Hugh clutched at the idea as a drowning man clutches at a straw. The question then arose, should he write to Mrs. Windybank or should he go and see her ? On reflection Hugh came to the conclusion that the letter would be an awkward one to write. Cut to the heart as he was by Viola's conduct, and angry as he was—for he now *was* angry with Viola, and he knew that it was a righteous anger—he felt he could not accuse Viola to her own relations ; and it was difficult to write without casting reflections on her behaviour. It would be better for him to go and see Mrs. Windybank. He could then tell her what had happened with greater delicacy than would appear in a letter. What on paper looks brutal can be softened down when spoken. He must make Viola's sudden flight appear as little blameworthy as possible : he must palliate her conduct, find excuses for her, place the burden of responsibility on his own shoulders.

So he decided just to send a short note to Mrs. Windybank, simply saying that Viola was away on

a visit, that he was not altogether easy in his mind about her, and would like the opportunity of consulting her grandmother.

The letter was written, and produced no little excitement, not unmingled with astonishment, at Mrs. Windybank's breakfast-table at Northbridge.

'There, Mother, what did I tell you?' cried Caroline triumphantly. 'I always said that Viola was no better than she should be. But you never listened to me. What do you think of your dear Viola now?'

As a matter of fact Miss Windybank had never said anything of the kind : but when one woman cordially dislikes another, and thinks she has an opportunity of getting her knife into her, she is not accustomed to lay overmuch stress upon accuracy of statement.

Mrs. Windybank, however, did not call attention to this patent fact : she merely remarked gently, 'If Viola is, as you say, no better than she should be, for that matter neither are you, nor I, nor any one else. But why all this excitement? There is nothing that I can see in Lord Kinfell's letter to justify you in imagining that there is anything seriously amiss.'

'Oh, my dear Mother, how innocent you are! Cannot you see that Viola has run away from him? I always said she would. Poor young man! I do pity him. I always said that he would regret marrying a Chalfont : as Julia did in her time, and as anybody else would who'd done anything so foolish.'

Again Miss Windybank's memory was at fault. She may have thought that Kinfell would find his wife trying, but she had never for a moment dreamed that a selfish and ambitious young woman, as she firmly believed Viola to be, would throw aside the advantages her husband's rank and wealth gave her.

'That is just like you, Caroline, jumping to conclusions, without anything whatever to go upon,'

said Mrs. Windybank. 'Lord Kinfell distinctly says that Viola has gone to stay with friends.'

'Of course, he *says* so : but you can easily read between the lines that the friends are all bunkum. He would not want to come and consult you about a friendly visit, or indeed about anything that wasn't very serious.'

'I don't see that,' replied Mrs. Windybank : 'if Lord Kinfell is anxious about Viola, it is only natural, now that her father is dead, that he should turn to her mother's people.'

'He has never done any turning before,' replied Caroline : 'I don't blame him, for of course it is Viola's fault that they have taken no notice of us since their marriage : but he would never begin turning to us now, if there wasn't something pretty bad to turn about.'

'You forget, my love, that you refused Viola's invitation to her wedding : and after that I am not surprised that she has ignored us.'

It is sad to have to record the fact ; but truth is truth, and it must be confessed that at this shrewd thrust Caroline snorted. Her mother was absolutely right ; but Miss Windybank was not one to acknowledge that she had ever been in the wrong.

'Of course I refused to go to that silly wedding. I had no patience with her selling herself for money and a title. However, you may say what you like : it's all Viola's fault. You see Lord Kinfell takes the first opportunity, directly Viola is out of the way, of turning to us as you call it. And you will find I am right ; Viola has run away. I wonder who the man is !'

Viola's aunt was less charitable in her view of the missing wife than Viola's husband. But this was too much for Viola's grandmother.

'How can you say such things, Caroline ? And

you keep contradicting yourself, too. I really am surprised at you! Even admitting that Viola has left her husband—and I am convinced you are wrong—it is absurd and unchristian to suggest that she has run away with another man.'

Miss Windybank shrugged her shoulders: 'I feel perfectly certain she has. It is the Chalfont strain in her. There never was much of the Windybank in Viola.'

'I don't see how you can know that, my love, considering that you've never seen Viola since she was about ten years old.'

'Still I do know it. I always knew that Viola was a thorough Chalfont: and subsequent events have proved that I was right.'

It is always amusing to note how the collaterals (and sometimes even the parents) of the young put down all the shortcomings of the rising generation to its descent from the other side of the house. To the Joneses it is the 'Smith strain' that accounts for all youthful evil: to the Smiths, the 'Jones strain' alone is responsible. The sins of the fathers may descend to the children: but it is for the sins of the fathers-in-law that the latter are held guilty—at any rate by the sons and daughters of men.

'I do not agree with you, Caroline,' persisted Mrs. Windybank: 'there was a great deal of poor Julia in Viola: to my mind the child was a regular Windybank. But you, my love, always resembled in character my side of the house.' Which remark alone was sufficient to show to anybody that Caroline was her mother's favourite child.

'Well, we shall see,' she said: 'I suppose I must write for you to Lord Kinfell, saying that we shall be glad to see him here. But I must arrange to be at home when the man comes. It is very inconvenient with Barbara lying ill at the Hospital.'

And so it was arranged.

When the day arrived for Lord Kinfell's advent, Mrs. Windybank and her daughter were in a flutter of excitement at the prospect of seeing one of whom they had heard and thought so much ; and still more of hearing the real facts regarding Viola. Caroline clung firmly to her opinion that Viola had run away from her husband : and Caroline's mother, knowing her daughter's dislike of her niece and knowing also her daughter's outspokenness, was filled with anxious fears lest Miss Windybank should say something which would offend or wound her guest. Setting a watch upon one's own lips is no easy task : but setting a watch upon other people's lips is still heavier work.

'I hope, my love,' she said, 'that you will remember that Lord Kinfell is Viola's husband. Men do not like to hear their wives criticised : and it would be most unfortunate if you said anything which would cause him to feel any annoyance or distress.'

'All right, Mother, I'll be on my best behaviour. But you may take it from me that Hugh isn't best pleased with Viola himself : and he'll have a lot of fault to find with her, you may depend.'

'That may be, my love. I do not agree with you ; but even if you are right, he will resent any reflections cast upon his wife by another, even by one of her near relations. Indeed he would object to it even more from a relation than from a stranger.'

Here Mrs. Windybank spoke as a married woman, and her daughter as a single one. The two points of view are often surprisingly different.

'Please don't worry yourself, Mother. I will be very careful,' said Caroline. And with that Mrs. Windybank had to be content. Not that her fears were allayed : for in her heart of hearts she doubted whether Caroline's feelings would not outrun her

discretion. Still she had given her warning, and said no more.

Kinfell arrived in time for tea, and was received with a cordial kindness and old-fashioned courtesy which at once put him at ease—that is to say, at as much ease as his anxieties permitted. After the rites of hospitality had been duly performed, and justice had been done to the excellent tea and cakes, Hugh proceeded to unfold his tale : and if his hearers' blood did not freeze, and if their hair did not resemble that of the fretful porpentine, it may safely be alleged that they were filled with astonishment and horror. At least this was the case with Mrs. Windybank, for Caroline had the satisfaction of hearing that to some extent at least her reading of the situation had been accurate.

On his way down from town, Hugh had carefully considered how much he should reveal of the real truth to his wife's relations. With natural reluctance he had come to the conclusion that it was useless to try to conceal the real facts—all he could do was to gloss them over as much as possible, where they reflected upon Viola's conduct. He therefore stated in the simplest possible language that his relations with Viola had for some time been unsatisfactory : that she had found living with him intolerable—he could not say why, except that with the best intentions in the world he wasn't clever and brilliant, and Viola found him dull : and finally that Viola had left him, and that he did not know where she was. He had come to find out whether Mrs. Windybank knew anything of any friends of Viola's to whom she might possibly have gone, or could suggest any way of discovering the whereabouts of the truant wife.

He said all this so simply, he showed such a deep love for his wife, he was so ready to blame himself for what had happened, he was so eager to defend

Viola, that Mrs. Windybank fell in love with him on the spot. Caroline was not far behind her mother in this respect : but whereas Mrs. Windybank, with her quick sympathy and her intuitive knowledge of the workings of the mind, was able in a measure to understand the position of the misguided wife as well as to pity the unfortunate husband, Caroline was simply filled with indignation at this ungrateful treatment of a deserving and indulgent man.

A long discussion followed, a discussion that resulted in exactly nothing at all. The Windybanks knew no former friends of Viola's. Mrs. Windybank indeed suggested that Viola might have intended to come to her own relations : but Caroline scouted the idea. The proof of the pudding was in the eating thereof. Viola had *not* come to them—had not even communicated with them. Out of respect to her mother, more than that, out of respect for Hugh—whose sad face affected her more than she would have dreamed possible—Caroline made no suggestion that Viola had eloped with another man. Yet that this was the solution of the mystery, she had not a shadow of doubt. She kept it to herself while talking to Hugh : but in her subsequent discussions with her mother, she did not attempt to conceal her conviction.

Then Hugh had to be told of the disaster which had befallen the Windybank family : how that Viola's cousin, Barbara, had come back from New Zealand ; how that she had been in a railway accident ; how that she had been providentially saved from a terrible death, but was lying sadly mutilated in a hospital. And even in the midst of his own misery he found time to give many a compassionate and sympathetic thought to a young girl who had been so sadly handicapped at the beginning of her womanhood. Being a man—and, moreover, a man very susceptible to

the influences of beauty—he realised perhaps better than did either Mrs. Windybank or Caroline what anguish a personal disfigurement meant to a woman, and how it shut her off from much of the joy and happiness proper to her sex. And his lacerated heart grew very tender at the thought of Viola's cousin, and of all that she had suffered, and all that she had still to suffer in the days to come.

CHAPTER III

AT NORTHBRIDGE

GREAT was the excitement of all concerned when at last the day arrived for Barbara's removal from Merchester Hospital to her grandmother's house at Northbridge. She went in a closed motor, accompanied by her nurse and her aunt ; and it was with almost childish delight that she gazed upon the beautiful undulating country lying between Merchester and Northbridge, over which the dawning spring had just breathed the breath of life. The brown trees were transfigured by a rosy hue, as if they were blushing at the spring's first kiss : and the meadows—like the sweet fields of the 'land of pure delight'—'stood dressed in living green.' There were no leaves out yet : but the catkins had begun to decorate the woods with pale-green tassels, and there were already a few snow-white lambs skipping about the fields.

Every spring comes as a new birth to all of us : but especially new did it seem to this girl who had no conscious memory of any other spring. And fair indeed did the rolling landscape appear to her, who had likewise no conscious memory of any view save that commanded by her window in Merchester Hospital. Barbara was half-intoxicated by the wonder and the beauty of it all.

But the most thrilling moment was reached when the motor had climbed the steep hill leading to the upper part of the old town of Northbridge, and had pulled up at Mrs. Windybank's front door. Caroline

and the nurse helped Barbara out of the car ; and her grandmother, standing at the gate, welcomed her in a loving embrace. As they walked hand-in-hand up the flagged path to the front door, the girl gazed about her with a puzzled look on her face ; that face which was now freed from its bandages, and covered instead by a thick gauze veil.

‘ It seems somehow familiar,’ she said : ‘ I feel as if I had been here before.’

On hearing this the nurse pressed forward, and came alongside of her patient : it was she who had always been firm in the belief that familiar surroundings would restore the dormant memory ; and she was filled with anxiety to hear what her patient would say next.

By this time they were standing in the white-panelled hall. ‘ Yes,’ exclaimed Barbara : ‘ I feel as if I had seen these white walls before, some time in a dream. And now I’m going into the garden.’

She made her way at once across the hall and through the glass door which led into the garden, with the three elder women following close on her heels. ‘ It all comes back to me though very dimly,’ she said, putting her hand to her forehead. ‘ And oh !—I remember the swing. I used to love the swing.’

Swiftly she crossed the lawn and went down a flight of grassy steps to a lower lawn, in the corner of which stood something between a football goal and a gallows—namely the remains of the children’s swing. The rope had vanished long ago, but the wooden framework was still standing. ‘ This is where I used to swing : I can remember that quite well.’

‘ And do you remember anything else, Miss Lane ? ’ asked the nurse, who was pale to the lips with excitement.

‘ Yes. I can remember a boy with a white collar who used to swing me from behind ; and a little girl

with red hair who used to stand in front, and push me back again.'

'She means Willie and Viola,' exclaimed Miss Windybank. 'They all used to play together here.'

'There, didn't I tell you?' cried the nurse, turning to the others in triumph. 'I was always sure that her memory would come back when she got into familiar surroundings.'

'That is all that I can remember,' said Barbara with a sigh: 'I'm afraid I can't recall any more.'

'And quite enough for one day too, Miss Lane,' replied the delighted nurse. 'You are getting on splendidly.'

'She must come indoors now and have some luncheon and a rest,' said Mrs. Windybank, taking Barbara's arm and leading her back to the house. 'How well and quickly you walk, my love: there is not much of the invalid about you now!'

'There's still this,' replied Barbara, touching the grey gauze veil that hid her face. And there was to be 'this' for many a long day.

'You are very thin, my dear,' said Mrs. Windybank when the veil had been removed and they all sat down at luncheon, and carefully kept their eyes from the scars which were now disclosed. But though Mrs. Windybank would have died rather than refer to Barbara's face, she felt there was no harm in talking about her figure. That was still beautiful to the eye.

'And what would you expect after all that she has gone through?' exclaimed the nurse. 'She has lost flesh terribly since her accident, and seemed to get thinner and thinner every day in Hospital. But now that she is safe at home, you will have to fatten her up again, Mrs. Windybank, and make her as strong and well as she was before.'

'I will certainly do my best, Nurse.'

After lunch the nurse went back to Merchester in the car : and Barbara was left to the tender care of her aunt and grandmother.

Now that she was away from the Hospital and all its painful associations, she made still more rapid strides towards recovery : each day spent at Northbridge seemed to increase her health and strength : but her memory did not fulfil the hopes that had been raised by her recognition of her grandmother's garden. That both Dr. Culpepper and the nurse—who still took a great interest in their former patient—put down to the fact that her recollection of Northbridge was such a distant one. It belonged to the time of her childhood, and not to her more recent life. Had she been perfectly well, and had there been no terrible shock to obliterate her memory, her recollections of the scenes of her childhood would naturally have been but vague : we can none of us recall very distinctly the places where we lived and the events which happened to us before we were ten years old ; therefore the memory of Northbridge was not strong enough thoroughly to reawaken the girl's dormant powers. But the fact that it had done so to a certain degree, strengthened both Dr. Culpepper and Nurse Tudball in their belief that a return to the home of her later girlhood would restore Barbara's memory altogether. But that was an impossible remedy for the present.

Still there was no doubt that Barbara's memory was much better after her return to Northbridge than it was before. In the Hospital she had completely forgotten how to read or write : but at Northbridge she learned to read again so quickly that it was evident that her subliminal memory was helping her. Writing was not so easy to her, neither was sewing. It seemed as if her hands were almost more forgetful than her head, for everything mechanical was so

difficult to her at first. It was quite a long time before she was even able to do her own hair : and it was longer still before she learned to handle her needle skilfully, though in her New Zealand days Barbara had been specially praised by her mother and teachers for the beauty and neatness of her needlework. But in time she mastered these difficulties also ; although it must be admitted that both her sewing and her handwriting were more like those of a schoolgirl than of a grown-up young woman. Her intellect, however, with the one great exception of her memory, showed no sign of the shock which had wellnigh killed her. As soon as she was able once more to read with ease, she devoured every book within her reach : she seemed set upon re-learning all that she had forgotten : and as Dr. Windybank, with one of the strange inconsistencies from which few natures are exempt, had been a great lover of reading and had collected a very fair library, albeit not a very solid one, Barbara found plenty of mental food wherewith to assuage her voracious young appetite. The fact that the late doctor's taste had run to light rather than to serious literature, made his library all the more agreeable a pasturage for a youthful and feminine mind. Moreover, though she could not really remember the past, she had faint suggestions of it now and again. They were hardly clearer than those dim memories of which we are all conscious occasionally, that the thing which is now happening has happened before, though it eludes our minds how and when and where it happened : but still they were there. Now and then a faint recollection came to her of the white-collared little boy and the red-haired little girl with whom she used to play in the old hanging garden : and she had also very occasionally a dim and shadowy knowledge that she had once had a father, and that he was in some

way connected in her mind with sorrow. She could not actually remember her father or her sorrow at her father's death : but she had a haunting memory of both it and him ; the sort of memory that one has sometimes of a certain melody which one in vain endeavours to recall. Of her mother, and of Willie as a man, she had no recollection at all : and her visions of her father and her childhood's playfellows were so elusive that it did her more harm than good to try to focus them. Therefore Dr. Culpepper strongly dissuaded her from straining her injured memory until it should return to her of its own accord.

Now that the girl's physical health had so much improved, she was able to take long walks, either alone or with her aunt, in the beautiful country around Northbridge : and her passion for beauty—a passion which had its roots in the very depths of her being, far too deep for any outward accident to touch—was satisfied and at the same time stimulated by the exquisite fairness of her surroundings.

She was very quick to learn—quicker than she had been before her illness, because she now felt that she had so much lost time and learning to make up—and she swiftly assimilated all the wealth of history and tradition in which the old town of Northbridge is so rich. The historical instinct—which as it happened both her granddaughters had inherited from her—was very strong in Mrs. Windybank : to her all old places and old buildings brought a message from the past ; a message full of the wisdom of the ages, illuminated by the beauty of far-off days. Together she and her granddaughter visited Bishop Percy's black-and-white mansion near the banks of the river, and refreshed their minds with his *Reliques* and his *Anecdotes*, striving to revive in their own minds the wit and the humour of a bygone age : and together they went to the little white cottage near the

church, where Richard Baxter penned one of the most beautiful hymns that was ever written ; and there endeavoured to refresh their souls in 'the spiritual atmosphere still enfolding the abode of that most holy man. Oftentimes Mrs. Windybank repeated to Barbara that message given to the world by the author of *The Saints' Rest*, for the comfort of all adventurous souls who desire to look into things which are at present hid from their eyes ; and who yearn to pierce the veil which divides this world from the next.

'Please say those two verses over again, Granny ; the two that you like best,' begged Barbara, one day when they had just passed Baxter's old house on their way home from a walk. Mrs. Windybank complied :

'Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before ;
He that, unto God's Kingdom comes
Must enter by that door.

My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim ;
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.'

'It is a beautiful message,' said Barbara.

'It is, my dear : and what is more, it tells all that is necessary for us to know about the life on the other side.'

'Still we cannot help being curious about what is going to happen to us after we die.'

'Of course we can't, my love : it is only natural that we should be : and for my part I do not blame those who try to find out more about that future life. When all is said and done, it matters more to us than anything. But though our *curiosity* may desire to learn more, for our *comfort* those verses are enough. If Christ be for us, who can be against us ? We know

that with Him we shall be safe, and that we shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck us out of His Hand.'

'Then do you think that to love and believe in Christ is enough for anybody?'

'Absolutely, my dear: I have no doubt on that score. Christ is all that really matters either in this world or the next. With Him, we have all things; without Him we have nothing and less than nothing. All the Churches and all the sects and all the religions have but one object, and that is to bring us to Christ. No Church is an end in itself: it is only a means to bring us to our Blessed Lord, and to keep us in touch with Him. Never forget this.'

'Then do you think all religions are equally true, Granny?' asked Barbara, who was already beginning to puzzle her untaught mind with questions of theology.

'Certainly not, my dear: they are only true in so far as they bring us into contact with the Living Christ. I think we ought to try the Churches as S. John tried the spirits: if they confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, they are of God: and if they do not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, they are not of God. It is quite a simple and straightforward test. If we are only in touch with Christ, we are safe both in this world and in the world to come, and we really needn't trouble our minds about anything else. And that is why those beautiful verses of Richard Baxter have taken away from me all fear of death.'

And surely Mrs. Windybank was right. Not all the spiritualists and occultists who have ever stormed the wall of partition and have striven, perhaps successfully, to learn something about the life on the other side, can tell us anything more comforting and soul-satisfying than this message given to sorrowing

mankind by a Nonconformist divine of the seventeenth century. It embraces all that it is necessary to know of that new life awaiting us beyond the river.

Sometimes Mrs. Windybank and Barbara went farther afield, and visited the various places of interest in the neighbourhood in order to cull therefrom fragrant memories of the past : and from none of them were the devout and receptive souls of the grandmother and grandchild sent altogether empty away. It must be remembered that at this time the mind of Barbara was a complete blank ; and she was therefore more susceptible even than are normal girls of her age to external impressions. The foundations of her conscious character required to be laid afresh : and she was fortunate in having so good and intelligent a woman as her grandmother to lend a helping hand in the laying of these corner-stones.

Impelled by a half-formed idea that family skeletons should be confined to their own particular closets, Caroline Windybank had not said a word to Barbara with regard to Viola Kinfell's disappearance, as long as Barbara was in the Hospital ; but when the girl was settled at Northbridge under the family roof-tree, this particular skeleton was trotted out for her inspection. Her aunt had already aroused her easily awakened interest by describing Viola's unusual beauty and Viola's consequent brilliant marriage ; although Miss Windybank had not omitted to add that she only knew about her niece's adult beauty by hearsay, as she herself had never been considered grand enough to view the paragon face to face after the latter grew up : but no word of Viola's bad behaviour did Barbara hear until she was established in the rose-covered room which had once been her mother's. To have discussed in Merchester Hospital her niece's reprehensible conduct would, in Caroline's mind, have savoured of the bad habit of washing

one's dirty linen in public : but in the privileged seclusion of her mother's house, Miss Windybank let her tongue go ; and it was the sort of tongue that went a good long way if it was, so to speak, given its head. Certainly her aunt was the last person to appear as an advocate on behalf of the peccant peeress ; for Miss Windybank always, as schoolboys say, had ' got a down ' on the Chalfonts.

Of course Barbara was thrilled with the revelation : what young girl would not have been ? And her interest was intensified by the glowing colours in which Caroline painted the hero of the story. According to Miss Windybank, Lord Kinfell was a living ideal of English manhood ; and that made his wife's foolish and heartless conduct all the more heinous in Barbara's eyes. Had she been able to recall her journey from London, on the day of the fatal accident, she could have told a different story, and would have been able to put in a plea on Viola's behalf : but of that journey she had no more recollection than the proverbial man in the moon ; so she took all her aunt's statements about Viola's husband as gospel. It was strange that Caroline, who had always been such a man-hater, should have lost her heart to Kinfell : her mother could not understand it at all : but the reason was not far to seek. Caroline's hatred of men was a general sort of sentiment, but her hatred of the Chalfonts was a very particular one indeed : and she regarded Hugh as their victim, and ranged herself on his side accordingly. It was not that she hated men less, but the Chalfonts more. She regarded Viola's repudiation of the marriage-bond as all in a piece with her earlier repudiation of the claims of her grandmother (which perhaps it was) ; and Caroline Windybank had no patience with, nor pity for, anybody who failed in respect towards her beloved mother. Therefore Lord Kinfell found an

enthusiastic advocate, and Lady Kinfell a merciless judge, in the person of Miss Caroline Windybank.

Poor Mrs. Windybank was sorely torn in two on the matter. On the one hand she devoutly acquiesced in the Victorian worship of the wedding-ring ; and also she, like her daughter, had been greatly impressed by Hugh Kinfell's goodness and singleness of heart : but on the other hand she was ever pitiful to wrong-doers, and Viola moreover was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. As a matter of fact the whole affair was beyond her : the idea of a wife's running away from her husband simply because he bored her, was a thing undreamed of in Mrs. Windybank's philosophy. She might have understood a wife's running away from a husband who beat her, though she would have found a difficulty in condoning even this : but the psychology of a wife who found her husband too dull to live with was as much beyond Mrs. Windybank's comprehension as was the making of an aeroplane. These things did not belong to her day and generation.

Although Barbara was greatly supported and comforted by Dr. Culpepper's assurances that in time she would completely lose her disfigurement, it was nevertheless a bitter trial to her. She rarely spoke of it except in jest ; it was one of those troubles that lie too deep for serious words : but it was a source of acute anguish to her. She felt that on account of it she was somehow set apart and cut off from her kind : and that is a feeling which is wellnigh insupportable to a normal and healthy-minded human being. There are some people who like to feel that they are different from the common herd—that there is a gulf set between them and their fellows. But these are unhealthy, morbid persons ; and of such were none of the Windybank family. This discipline might have been good for Barbara's soul, but it certainly militated against her happiness. It robbed her of the self-

assurance and certainty of social success which were natural to her time of life : she had more of the diffidence of an old woman than the temerity of a young one. But on the other hand it eliminated from her character many of the faults peculiar to youth : and rendered her humble and patient and tender and considerate beyond her years. Her accident might, at any rate for a time, have spoiled her face : but it had done much towards the beautifying of her soul. Still the fact remained that she was acutely conscious of her disfigurement ; and this over-sensitive consciousness prevented her from being as happy with her grandmother and aunt, in this pretty, peaceful home, as she would otherwise have been. It also helped to keep her from enjoying the companionship of those of her own age. The young are cruel, even to each other ; and shrink instinctively, with the horror natural to all healthy young animals, from anything abnormal in their fellows. Barbara was young enough to recognise this peculiarity of youth although she herself had outgrown it : but what a price she had paid for her immunity !

One evening—the evenings had grown long by this time—Mrs. Windybank and her daughter and her granddaughter were sitting in her pretty drawing-room which overhung the cliff just above the river ; the hands of the three ladies were busy with various kinds of needlework, but their eyes often strayed to the glorious view spread out before their eyes, of the land that lay beyond the Severn. As frequently happened, they were engaged in discussing the topic which interested them just then beyond all others—the topic of Lady Kinfell's disappearance. There is something very soothing and delightful in a household of women. They are never dull, as they talk incessantly ; while the subjects which they discuss are as a rule too remote or too trivial to afford them any-

thing save agreeable recreation. Men so soon have finished with a subject : they say all there is to be said about it, and then they feel there ~~is~~ no more to be said. But women do not suck a conversational orange dry like this. Not they ! They are too well versed in the art of deriving interest and amusement out of anything and everything and even out of nothing. When everything has been said, they say it all over again : and then they say it all the other way about : then they begin at the beginning and pursue it to the end ; and then they begin at the end and trace it all back to the beginning. When they have done all this on one day, they see no earthly reason why they should not do it again on the next : and so they go on, and thereby prevent the world from becoming as dull and solemn and businesslike as it would be without them—if indeed in those circumstances it could exist at all, which is a doubtful problem.

‘I wonder if Lord Kinfell has heard any news yet of Viola,’ Mrs. Windybank was saying.

Caroline shook her head. ‘I don’t think so, Mother : if he had, I am sure he would have let us know. He promised to do so as soon as he heard anything ; and—if my judgment is of any value—he is the last man to break a promise.’

‘He must really be rather wonderful,’ remarked Barbara softly, little dreaming what things she had said about this same man on her journey from London to Merchester.

‘I don’t know about his being wonderful,’ objected her aunt : ‘men aren’t given to being what you call wonderful : but I must confess he is my ideal of a straightforward English gentleman.’

The girl smiled. ‘I think we mean pretty much the same thing, Aunt Caroline. After all there is nothing much more wonderful in the man line than a straightforward English gentleman.’

‘Oh! isn’t there? There are prophets and apostles and martyrs and saints, to say nothing of Lord Mayors and Chairmen of County Councils. They are all much more wonderful than a simple and unassuming peer: at least so the great British Public would tell you, and it is always supposed to be right.’ Miss Windybank never troubled to hide her scorn of anything which savoured of Democracy. Unlike her mother she was not too old to recognise the power of the new democratic era which was already beginning to turn the world upside-down: but she was much too Conservative to understand it.

‘I think that Barbara is right and that you both mean the same thing,’ said Mrs. Windybank, ever intent upon making peace, even if there was—as in the present case—no peace to be made. ‘And I am sure that I never met a stranger to whom I took more quickly than I did to Lord Kinfell.’

‘It beats me how Viola could run away from a husband like that,’ said Barbara. ‘I should always have taken him out on a lead for fear of losing him, if he had been mine.’

‘And especially when he was so what advertisements call “inclusive.” You see he included a coronet and two large estates, and it was very unlike a Chalfont to turn her back upon such advantages,’ added her aunt.

‘Still the fact remains that, Chalfont or no Chalfont, Viola did turn her back upon all those desirable things: so perhaps she was not as worldly as you imagine, my dear,’ pleaded Mrs. Windybank, always ready to score a point in a criminal’s favour.

Caroline snorted. ‘She was worldly enough, never fear! She wouldn’t have been a Chalfont if she hadn’t been. But nothing will ever make me believe that Viola ran away alone, though her poor husband is so chivalrous as to think she did. For my part, I

feel sure that it was really her worldliness that started her off ; and that if we knew the truth, we should find that the prizes for which she ran were three large estates, and more balls to her coronet.'

'But, my dear Caroline, a man with three large estates, and goodness knows how many balls to his coronet, couldn't vanish into air. Important people do not disappear without any one's noticing that they are no longer there. If this great personage that you are talking about had run away with Viola, surely somebody would have missed him, and would have put two-and-two—or rather one-and-one—together.' Mrs. Windybank, though gentle, was shrewd.

'Then where is she, Mother ? That is what I want to know.'

'It is what we all want to know, my dear, and we can't find out. And I do not altogether like the suggestion that Viola was not unaccompanied to be made in Barbara's presence. I cannot think it a suitable topic to be discussed before a young girl.'

Both Barbara and her aunt laughed at this, and the former exclaimed, 'Oh, Granny dear, how priceless you are ! As if a girl of twenty-one—a woman in fact—could be still kept in the nursery and fed upon pap. Surely I am old enough to know that men and women sometimes run away together.'

'You may be, my dear,' replied her grandmother ; 'although I wasn't at your age. But young people are quite different from what they were when I was a girl. It often surprises me how much they do know.'

'And it is especially surprising in Barbara's case,' added Miss Windybank, as usual saying aloud what other people only thought, 'considering that she has forgotten everything she knew up to the last six months.'

The puzzled look of which Dr. Culpepper and Nurse Tudball disapproved came into Barbara's eyes. 'It

surprises me too : it surprises me dreadfully. I so often seem to know things that I cannot possibly have picked up since my accident ; and yet I have utterly forgotten how or where I got hold of them. Dr. Culpepper said that this is because my subconscious memory is all right, and only my conscious memory was smashed up in the accident : and that this is a very hopeful sign that the whole show will come back some day. But I must say I should be glad if my subconscious memory would be a little more communicative : it seems silly of it to keep so many secrets from my conscious memory and me !’

Mrs. Windybank’s loving eyes had caught sight of the puzzled look that was not considered good for Barbara, so she hastened to guide the conversation, back to the erring Viola. ‘It certainly does seem strange that Viola should so completely have disappeared ; especially as, according to all accounts, she was such a very striking-looking young woman. I sometimes wonder if she is still alive.’

‘Sure to be, Mother : those selfish sort of people are always “still alive.” Trust them !’

‘And besides,’ added Barbara, ‘if she wasn’t alive she wouldn’t be able to go on hiding herself. She couldn’t have gone and died and buried herself without mentioning the matter to anybody. Alive she may hide herself ; but dead she would have been sure to be discovered. There must have been a funeral of sorts.’

‘Unless she was murdered,’ suggested Miss Windybank.

‘Then there would have been an inquest ; which is even more public than a funeral,’ said Barbara.

‘But who would want to murder her, my dear ?’ asked Mrs. Windybank. ‘The poor child seems to have no enemy but herself.’

‘No : I don’t think she is dead : if she were, I am

sure Lord Kinfell would have heard of it and would have passed the news on to you. We know how anxious she was to remain undiscovered, because her maid told him how she secretly smuggled a plain week-end case and a set of unmarked linen for her journey. Lord Kinfell himself told you that, Auntie Car. No, I am sure she is alive, but is keeping up her disguise just to vex her husband ; which is very horrid of her, considering what a dear he is,' said Barbara, little dreaming that in what she called her 'smashed-up memory' lay concealed the whole truth about the missing Lady Kinfell.

CHAPTER IV

HAROLD TIMPANY

THE young man who was travelling by the same train as Barbara Lane and her cousin, and who had succeeded in saving one of the two though he was too late to save the other, was—as Dr. Culpepper had said—a member of a thoroughly nice, well-brought-up family. On the occasion of the railway accident he had displayed great promptitude and courage. He had been in the back part of the train which was not injured at all; and—with the majority of uninjured passengers—had rushed forward to render what help was possible. When he came to the remains of the carriage containing the two girls, the one was so completely buried under a heap of burning wood that it was impossible to get near to her; but the other—though quite unconscious—was still alive, and the flames had only just reached her. With great pluck, and not without considerable risk to himself, Harold Timpany dragged the unconscious girl out of the burning mass, and carried her to a place of safety; and then returned to the scene of danger to render what further help he could. The further help that he was able to render has nothing to do with this story: but his first act of heroism was not without its influence both upon himself and the girl he had so bravely rescued.

Harold Timpany had many excellences: he had also certain limitations: which statements merely serve to show that he was very much the same as everybody else. He was a competent, straight-

forward, and shrewd man of business ; and he had the makings of an excellent husband, given a wife that was, so to speak, word-perfect in her part. He could not have stood a better-half who had any suspicion that she *was* better—that is to say, one who stood up to him, and knew (or thought she knew) as well as he did about current affairs : that would never have done ! What he wanted was a pretty girl who would look up to him, and share his unshakable conviction that Harold Timpany knew more about everything than did everybody else put together. This may sound an exorbitant demand, but it really is not. Many men succeed in obtaining a wife after this pattern, or at any rate believe that they do, which comes to the same thing as far as they are concerned. It is but fair to Harold to add that the thought of money never entered into his calculations with regard to his at present problematical wife. He fully intended to *make* money, but it would never have occurred to him to *marry* it : in which he was superior to a good many men who would have considered him vastly their inferior. He was not worldly in the accepted sense : neither was he selfish or extravagant or bad-tempered : in fact if only he had not known how to govern the Country better than did the Government—or to manage the Navy better than did the First Lord of the Admiralty—or to regulate the Army better than did the Commander-in-Chief—Harold Timpany would have been a very nice fellow indeed. But this blatant omniscience went against him. From a purely social point of view it is almost better to eat peas with a knife than to know better than everybody else ; and infallibility was Harold's besetting sin. He was never wrong : he never had been : there did not seem any reason why he ever should be : and therefore he found it difficult to pardon those misguided persons who were so mistaken as to imagine that he was.

It was his omniscience that had nipped in the bud so many of his love-affairs. The young ladies whom he honoured with his attentions—and there were a good many such young ladies—were apt, in the exuberance of their inexperienced youth, now and then to put their admirer right in some trifling matter, and to add their quota to his social education : and that was the end of them as far as Harold Timpany was concerned. He was one of those people who, if they are reproved for committing any trifling solecism, go on doing it in order to show that they have never done it at all. An illogical but not uncommon type.

On the other hand Harold possessed a gift which greatly modified the displeasing effect of his omniscience, and in some cases minimised it to vanishing point ; he was exceptionally good-looking. He happened to be one of those living epistles which—as Barbara Lane remarked to her father in New Zealand days now so long ago—had been put into the wrong envelope which did not match the contents. The inner man of Harold Timpany was plain and straightforward and commonplace : the outer one was handsome, graceful, and distinguished-looking. There was no gainsaying the beauty of his appearance. And in justice to him it must be added that he was not vain of his looks ; there was nothing of the dandy or the popinjay about him. As is the way with many of us, Harold was far more conceited about the gifts that he did not possess than about those that he did. His good looks, which were considerable, he regarded as of little consequence : but his aplomb as a man of the world, which was infinitesimal, he worshipped as a fetish. He was tall and well-built, with fair curly hair, bright blue eyes, and good features ; and, like King David, he was of a ruddy countenance.

It must be admitted that Harold was very susceptible to feminine charm ; and it seemed a pity

that the girls he admired were so much addicted to ruffling him ; for he was already in a position to have a home of his own (his father having lately taken him into partnership), and he was anxious, as old-fashioned people say, ' to settle.' In spite of his considerable business ability, he had a strong spice of romance and sentiment in his nature : and all this romance and sentiment had been stirred to their dregs by his rescue of the unconscious girl from the burning train. Not unnaturally he created a glamour about her in his own mind, until to him she became a combination and epitome of all the heroines of romance who have been saved by the prowess of their respective knights and deliverers. He called frequently to inquire after her at Merchestor Hospital, on his way to or from business, bringing her the most lovely hot-house fruit and flowers : and in this way Barbara in her turn began to surround with glamour her rescuer who supplied her with such charming reminders of his existence.

She did not see him while she was in the Hospital : her nurse did not consider her ready to receive a perfect stranger ; and the girl herself was too sensitive about her disfigurement to desire to do so : but after she had settled down in Northbridge and was practically well again, her aunt invited Harold to motor over to tea one afternoon in early summer, and then at last Barbara and the man who had saved her life met for the first time face to face.

Or rather not exactly face to face : Barbara still persisted in wearing the grey gauze veil over the lower part of her injured countenance. In vain her grandmother and aunt urged her to brave the ordeal of exposing her face to her friends and letting them get used to it ; but she refused to follow this advice. They impressed upon her the inconvenience of her custom, as it prevented her from being able to eat or drink in public : but nevertheless she stood firm. She

poured out the tea and handed the cakes in her grandmother's house ; but neither bite nor sup would she take when any strangers were present. When Barbara was alone with Mrs Windybank and Caroline, she discarded the grey veil : she was so firmly convinced of their love for her that she did not mind their seeing her as she was : but as yet she could not bear that any alien eyes should look upon those scars which to her were such a source of shame and misery. Therefore all that Harold Timpany saw was a tall and slender girl with glorious copper-coloured hair and beautiful moss-green eyes : the rest of her face was shrouded in grey gauze mystery. Her hair and eyes had always been the strong points in Barbara's appearance, and her nose and mouth the weak ones : so with the lower part of her face hidden, she would always have passed for a handsome girl.

As Harold gazed at the woman who seemed somehow to belong to him because it was to him that she owed her life, he felt the halo which already surrounded her increasing. All that he could see was equal to anything that he had dreamed ; and the grey gauze seemed in some way to add to the glamour and the mystery which always more or less hangs about the woman with whom a good man is beginning to fall in love : and, whatever his limitations, there is no doubt that Harold Timpany was in a position to offer to any woman the gift extolled by Rosalind, of ' a good man's love.'

Barbara asked that she might be allowed to see her deliverer for a few minutes alone, as she felt she could not thank him properly with her grandmother and aunt present : so as soon as he arrived at Mrs. Windybank's house, Harold was ushered into the drawing-room, where he found a slender grey-veiled girl sitting by herself. As she rose and came to meet him, the young man's heart beat very fast.

‘I wanted to see you alone for a minute before the others came in, to try to thank you for all that you have done for me,’ said Barbara, holding out both hands to her visitor. ‘Of course I know I can never thank you properly—nobody could do that to a man who had saved her life at the risk of his own—but I wanted to tell you just a bit of how tremendously grateful I feel.’

Harold cleared his throat: his voice was quite husky with emotion. ‘Pray don’t mention it, Miss Lane.’

‘But I must mention it: it’s a most awfully important thing to me. If it hadn’t been for you, I should have been dead and buried months ago.’

Harold dropped the two hands he was holding, but was still too much moved for speech. ‘I—I—was only too pleased——’ he stammered, with a scarlet face.

Barbara saw his emotion and understood it. ‘I won’t say any more, because it is impossible to put things like this into words: but I just want you to know how I feel about it, and how, as long as I live, I shall never cease to be grateful to you for your splendid heroism.’

‘You are too kind, Miss Lane—much too kind,’ replied Harold, who by this time was recovering himself: ‘any decent man would have done the same in the circs.’

The greenish eyes above the grey veil smiled. ‘Still, you were the one who did it, and so it is to you that I feel so tremendously grateful. And now here is my aunt.’

Miss Windybank entered the room, and she and Harold greeted each other quite as old friends. ‘I am so glad my niece has at last been able to thank you for herself,’ she said; ‘I was getting quite tired of trying to thank you on her behalf. It really is rather a business being grateful by proxy. And it

isn't altogether by proxy either : as you know how grateful all Barbara's relations are to you, as well as she herself.'

'But I am the most grateful,' interpolated Barbara : 'it is more important to have one's own life saved than merely the life of a niece !'

'But not when it is such a niece as this,' said Harold with a polite bow. By this time Richard was entirely himself again.

Then Mrs. Windybank came in and greeted the young man whom she had already met at Merchester Hospital, and the four went to tea in the oak-panelled dining-room. Mrs. Windybank always insisted in having tea in the dining-room, her argument being that it enabled people to eat more. To her hospitable soul the amount of solid food which could be secreted in a saucer or placed upon a tiny tea-plate on a small and insecure 'occasional table' (in her time it was the fashion to speak of movable furniture as 'occasional') was quite inadequate to be offered to a guest. Tea taken in that haphazard and picnic-like fashion she did not regard as a meal at all : only as a sort of eating between meals—a custom of which she heartily disapproved. So Mrs. Windybank always had tea in the dining-room, thinking that by this means she would tempt her friends to eat more than they could otherwise have done : and herein she was undoubtedly right.

Most of the ground floor was panelled at The Chevrons, which was the name of Mrs. Windybank's house ; so called because in each of the spandrels, formed by the pointed arch over the front door, was carved a shield with a chevron upon it—evidently the coat of the original owner. What his name was nobody knew ; the years had wiped it out : and what the coat of arms was nobody knew ; the weather of some centuries had obliterated all the carving save the chevrons that crossed the shields : but these had remained to give a name to the house long before

Dr. Windybank bought it; it had been known as The Chevrons for a hundred years and more. The panelling of the entrance-hall and the library was painted white, as it had been long before the Windybanks' time: but the dining-room was lined to the ceiling with oak grown black with age. The drawing-room—a long low room, 'evidently added at least a hundred and fifty years after the house was built—was not lined with wood at all, but was papered, in eighteenth-century fashion, with a white watered paper, divided into square panels by means of gilded mouldings and narrow wreaths of many coloured flowers.

Harold admired the house, but thought that it wanted 'doing up a bit,' as he expressed it to himself. Which was exactly what he would think. Young Timpany was nearly always true to type.

'It's a bit of a pull up here,' he remarked, when both the meal and the conversation were well under way: 'I was all right in the car: but it must be a stiff pull for walkers.'

'Oh! we are used to it,' replied Miss Windybank: 'and besides it strengthens our legs.'

'But walkers don't pull themselves up all that long way round, Mr. Timpany,' explained Barbara: 'they come up by the steps. Didn't you see a long sort of street made of stairs running from the top of the hill to the bottom?'

'Yes I did, Miss Lane, and I thought it jolly inconvenient. What you ought to do is to have an hydraulic lift from the road by the river to the top of the town. There'd be plenty of water in the river to work it.'

Mrs. Windybank gave a little squeal of horror. 'Oh no, Mr. Timpany! That would entirely spoil the beauty of the old town, and take away all its old-world look.'

‘What’s the good of an old-world look?’ inquired Harold. ‘Give me new-world contrivances.’

‘But an old-world look is so lovely,’ pleaded Barbara.

‘I can’t see it: and you can’t either, Miss Lane, when it is applied to people instead of to places. Why, as soon as a lady begins to have what you call an old-world look about her, she soon gets rid of it by means of new-world contrivances. You know she does!’ Mr. Timpany always spoke of men and women as ‘gentlemen and ladies’—unless he wished to mark his disapproval of them.

‘Age may not bestow beauty upon human beings,’ said Mrs. Windybank gently, ‘though I think that really it ought to do so if they took it in the right way: but it certainly bestows it upon all things made with hands. Even the plainest and simplest cottage, which was not at all beautiful when it was built, becomes so after it has weathered a century or two: and this rule applies much more to large buildings and towns and cities. Look at the old town-hall in the market-square here: nothing modern could be as beautiful as that!’

‘Don’t you believe it, Mrs. Windybank: it is all sentimental nonsense about old things and places being superior to new ones. I can’t stand the sort of houses that people are so fond of calling picturesque. They may be like a picture: but it’s a very inferior sort of picture to my mind. No: give me a modern house fitted with a telephone and electric light all over; and I won’t trouble you for anything in the picturesque line. I don’t care for it.’

‘You wouldn’t,’ said Caroline tersely.

It is a remarkable fact that if people pride themselves openly on either doing or not doing any special thing, they always take it in bad part if their friends agree with them in this particular form of

words. It is difficult to say why such expressions as 'You would' or 'You wouldn't' should be so offensive: but they are.

'Then aren't you keen on beauty at all, Mr. Timpany?' asked Barbara.

'Aren't I? That's all you know about it,' replied the worthy youth with an engaging smile: 'if you knew me better, you wouldn't ask such a question as that. But when I say beauty, I mean beauty; I don't mean decay and dirt.'

'We didn't exactly mean them, either,' said Miss Caroline.

'Age and picturesqueness come to the same thing. Show me an historical antiquity, and I'll show you a heap of insanitary rubbish that had better be burned to ashes.'

'As I should have been if it hadn't been for you,' added Barbara.

The young man laughed heartily. This obvious sort of repartee was not too subtle for him; and it had the further advantage of reflecting credit upon himself and his actions. 'That's good—very good, Miss Lane! You scored there. But though you may be picturesque, and I'm the last man to deny that you are, nobody could accuse you of being an historical antiquity.'

'Granny is always complaining how much too advanced the girls of the present day are: but I don't think that the modernest of modern girls could be an historical antiquity at twenty-one. She couldn't get it done in the time.' And Barbara laughed in her turn. In spite of his obvious limitations she was inclined to like Harold Timpany. For one thing he was young, and youth calls to youth: and then he had saved her life for her, which is a strong recommendation in any one's favour: and thirdly he was extremely handsome.

This was by no means the last visit of Harold Timpany to The Chevrons. As he himself put it, 'Having once found his way there, he could find it again.' In spite of his contempt for antiquities, he was much addicted to platitudes encrusted with age. He never allowed a spring or an autumn to pass without remarking, 'How the days are lengthening!—or shortening!'—as the case might be: nor did he ever live through a November without pointing out that 'Christmas will soon be upon us.' But long before the time arrived to make this last remark in that particular year of grace, Harold had become a frequent visitor at The Chevrons. By this time he was thoroughly in love with Barbara: as much in love as he had ever been with anybody in his life—which was saying a good deal: and as yet she had never let him see the lower part of her face. Although her accident had apparently destroyed her memory, it had in no way interfered with her instincts: she was just as young, and just as full of a young girl's longing for love and admiration, as if she had never travelled in that ill-fated train from London to Merchester: and—as far as her present experience went—Harold Timpany was the first young man she had ever known well. Moreover, her lot was cast among people much older than herself. Therefore Harold's obvious and sincere admiration—though not always happily expressed—was very grateful to her: and especially so in the mood of extreme sensitiveness which had been engendered by her disfigurement. So it is not to be wondered at that she shrank from putting his admiration and affection to the test by allowing him to see that disfigurement. Her mirror told her plainly enough that with her grey gauze veil she was a very good-looking young woman indeed; while without it she was very much the reverse: and although she could not recall her former ideas and

feelings with regard to her own personal appearance, the scores of novels she had read since she had come to Northbridge were enough to teach her how valuable an asset is beauty to any woman—which her feminine instincts would probably have taught her if she had never read a novel at all. So she was firm in her decision to follow Shakespeare's advice, for as long as possible, and to 'assume a virtue if you have it not'; and to lay claim, for as long as possible, to a gift which she herself knew she did not really possess. At twenty-one, beauty is worth having, even at the cost of always wearing a gauze veil in company : many women would count it so, at a much more advanced age : so the poor child seized the staff called Beauty, though she knew well enough that it was none of hers : and she yielded to the temptation to borrow it for as long as she could, and with it to rule her woman's kingdom even though she were only a usurper. True, there was another sceptre ready to her hand which was her own by right—the staff called Bands : but she was as yet too young and inexperienced to reject the false for the true, and by right of the true to enter into her own.

Very happy afternoons did she and Harold spend together that summer, either in a boat on the river or else in exploring on foot the lovely country in the neighbourhood of the beautiful old town. To Harold these excursions were delightful, for the simple and sufficing reason that he was in love : and to Barbara they were almost equally enjoyable, because for the first time in her conscious memory she was in the company of some one of her own generation ; and also because Harold in his ignorance thought her beautiful, and so she felt she was beautiful as long as she was with him, and could forget for the time what was hidden behind the grey gauze veil.

Of course Mrs. Windybank and Caroline saw which

way events were tending, and the former felt perfectly happy about them. She belonged to the generation which regarded marriage as a necessity only second in importance to salvation; and—although she would have perished at the stake rather than confess such knowledge—she was shrewd enough to know that the effects of the railway-accident would seriously militate against her granddaughter's chances of securing a husband. Being herself of gentle birth and breeding, she was of course acutely conscious that young Timpany was of neither; but, on the other hand, she had arrived—viâ Caroline and Dr. Culpepper—at the knowledge that Harold was of respectable parentage, good position, and considerable means, and also that his moral character left nothing to be desired. With her own eyes she could see how exceptionally good-looking he was. And to secure a husband endowed with all these satisfactory attributes, was not a fate to be despised by any young woman who had no fortune of her own, and who had lost all her memory and nearly all her looks—even if that husband could boast neither polished manners nor brilliant conversational powers: at least so Mrs. Windybank was sufficiently one of the children of this world to think, but far too much one of the children of light to say. Therefore she smiled encouragingly at the budding romance, and possessed her soul in patience.

But not so Miss Caroline. She was younger than her mother and more alert—sharper if not so wise: and she was by no means sure that the young girl's growing intimacy with Harold Timpany would in the end make for Barbara's happiness. Caroline was quite aware of the charm of Harold's good looks; she would not have been her father's daughter otherwise: she was also aware of his lack of good breeding: otherwise she would not have been her mother's child:

but with her usual well-balanced sense of proportion she felt that all this was Barbara's business and not hers. If Barbara wanted a handsome husband, let her have him : if she did not care for a well-bred one, let her do without him : all this was no affair of her aunt's : but it was her aunt's affair to see that the young and inexperienced girl under her charge did not die—or still worse live—with a broken heart for the sake of a lover who loved and who rode away. Caroline was not so sure of Harold's intentions as her mother was ; at least she was not sure of them after he had seen Barbara without her veil.

'It's like this, Mother,' she said one afternoon when Barbara and her lover were on the river, and Mrs. Windybank and her daughter were sitting on the top storey of the hanging garden at The Chevrons ; 'this young Timpany has never seen Barbara without that silly gauze affair which she buries herself in. I never approved of the thing at all, as you know ; I never wanted her to wear it. It seemed to me that she 'd better take the bull by the horns, and let people see the worst of her at once. They 'd soon get used to her scars, and not notice them. I wonder the girl isn't smothered in that awful winding-sheet sort of thing : I know I should be. However much I was disfigured I 'd rather people saw it at once than that I died of suffocation in hiding it from them. I really haven't patience with such Man-in-the-Iron-Mask nonsense !'

'But, my dear, you never have been disfigured : you have always had the pleasant consciousness of knowing that you were good to look upon : and that makes all the difference. I'm sure my heart often aches for the poor child when she takes off her veil. She looks so pretty with it ; and then when it comes off, it is such a revelation !'

'And don't I pity her, too ? But I can't see that

suffocation makes things any better. With that thing on, the girl can never breathe the fresh air properly. I'm afraid we shall have her dying for want of ventilation, or something of that sort.'

Mrs. Windybank still pleaded for her grandchild. 'But it is such a delight to a young girl to feel pretty—at least I think it must be, though it was a pleasure that I longed for in vain when I was young: and Barbara really is pretty when the lower part of her face is hidden.'

'If it comes to that she always was pretty till you saw the lower part of her face: but you never suggested bringing her up from childhood in a grey gauze veil to hide her worst features. If people began covering up all their features that weren't pretty, life would soon be nothing but one huge masked ball. As a child she hadn't a good nose and mouth; and in her photographs as a girl you can see they didn't grow any prettier. Her nose and mouth are pure Lane, though her hair and eyes are Windybank. As I have just said, if all the women with ugly mouths and noses had to hide them, we should soon have a muzzling order for women as well as for dogs.'

'But, my dear Caroline, it is not only that the dear child's nose and mouth are not as well-cut and refined as my children's were: that is a matter of very little moment: but it is the terrible scars left by her accident that Barbara hates people to see. And I cannot blame her.'

'Well, people must please themselves, and if I were disfigured I shouldn't go about for the rest of my life looking like the Veiled Prophet of some place that began with K: but that's neither here nor there. What's bothering me now is this: Barbara is falling in love with the Timpany person, and letting the Timpany person fall in love with her, before he has really seen what she is like: and my fear is that

when he does see what she is like, he will fall out again, and break her heart in the fall.'

Mrs. Windybank looked horrified. 'Oh! surely not, my love. If one really and truly loved anybody, a mere facial disfigurement could not kill that love. At least it wouldn't in my case.'

'Of course not: but you're a woman and a saint at that. It probably would if you were a man: and it is with a man that we have got to deal. I'm not blaming the Timpany creature for being a man; he can't help it; it isn't his fault. But it is our fault if we treat him as if he was a human being like ourselves, and expect him to act accordingly.'

'But, my dear, you seem to think that love—like beauty—is only skin-deep.'

'I do—when it is a man's love. And so I consider that it is Barbara's duty to let that tiresome young man see her face before she allows matters to go further. I don't care for the creature myself: he is too cock-sure and all-knowing for my taste: but I don't think it is fair to let him buy a pig in a poke—which is what we are doing if we allow him to propose to Barbara through that gauze veil.'

'But she will lose her disfigurement entirely in time, Caroline: Dr. Culpepper said so.'

'So she may. But if young Timpany is like the rest of his sex, he'll think more of what she looks like now than what she may look like in the future. If men married their wives for what they'd look like in the future and not what they looked like at the time, there'd be a considerable decline in the marriage-rate: therefore young Timpany ought to see her as she is now. Besides, as you yourself admit, even at her best Barbara was never really pretty: and yet she looks as if she were when the lower part of her face is hidden. So even if there'd been no disfigurement at all, I think that her future husband

would have the right to know that her nose was blunt and her chin broad, before he became her future husband.'

Mrs. Windybank could not deny this. 'I'm afraid you think that young Mr. Timpany is one of those commonplace people who cannot understand that the mind and soul are far more important than the body : and I dare say you are right, as he never strikes me as a particularly refined young man. So different from that charming Lord Kinfell !'

'Still, notwithstanding his refinement, Lord Kinfell thought more of the body than he did of the soul when he married Viola : or else he wouldn't have married her : and he is now learning the consequences of his mistake,' was Caroline's pertinent reply.

Again Mrs. Windybank was unable to contradict her daughter. 'I don't see what we can do,' she said sadly.

'It is quite plain what we can do, Mother ; and, what is more, we must do it. One of us will have to tell Barbara plainly that she must let the Timpany person see her whole face before either he or she drifts into actual love-making : and I think she'll stand it better from you than from me.'

Mrs. Windybank sighed. 'I'm afraid it will hurt the dear child's feelings.'

'It will hurt them a great deal more if she falls deeply in love with the young man, and he then throws her over after seeing her, since he is bound to see her sooner or later. And the sooner the better I say, both for him and for her.'

CHAPTER V

THE GREY VEIL

MRS. WINDYBANK did not at all like the duty which her daughter had laid upon her; nevertheless she could not help admitting to herself that her daughter was right, both as regards the duty itself and the suitability of the person selected to perform it. As a rule the people who like doing things are the people best suited to do them: but in a few—a very few cases—a minimum of willingness shows a maximum of competence. This was a case in point: the tenderness of heart and the depth of sympathy which made Mrs. Windybank shrink with all her soul from the task set before her, ensured the fulfilment of that task with the utmost kindness and consideration.

She had been so happy in her granddaughter's happiness: the girl's return to life and joy was more blessed to her than if it had been her own. It was such balm to her motherly heart to see Barbara restored not only to health but also to good spirits. And now Caroline asked her to overthrow with her own hands that castle in the air erected by Harold Timpany for Barbara's delight; for the sake of which architectural triumph Mrs. Windybank had forgiven him his lack of manners and his superfluity of self-assurance. But she felt it had to be. As Caroline succinctly if somewhat coarsely put it, 'It would never do to let the young man buy a pig in a poke.' He must not ask for Barbara's hand until he had seen Barbara's face.

As for the girl herself she was in that delightful

condition of humble gratitude and triumphant vanity which all women experience when they first perceive the heart of a man lying at their feet. With some the condition is so ecstatic that they mistake it for love itself. But this is an error : and an error which often has serious and far-reaching consequences. Gratitude for love is not the same thing as love, though it is sometimes perilously like it. In Barbara's case the condition was exceptionally ecstatic, as her natural girlish vanity had been laid so low by the results of her accident that it had seemed like one dead ; and now Harold was saving it from an early death, just as he had already saved its owner. No wonder that she felt grateful to him ! Moreover it must be borne in mind that she could remember nothing of her life prior to her accident and consequent disfigurement, so she had no memory of former triumphs to bear her up. As far as she now knew, Harold was the first person who had treated her as if she were as other girls, and who had admired her as other girls were admired. No wonder then that she shrank from disillusioning him by removing the grey gauze veil !

One summer's morning Barbara and her grandmother were sitting sewing in the library at The Chevrons—a room which needed no panelling as it was entirely lined with books. It was the only room on the ground floor, except the surgery, that looked out on to the street ; and Mrs. Windybank always enjoyed sitting in the old-fashioned bay-window and watching the passers-by. The surgery was never used as a sitting-room, only as a shelter for Miss Windybank's bicycle and the croquet-set and oddments of that kind—because Mrs. Windybank vowed that its atmosphere was impregnated with the pain and anxiety and misery of the people who had visited it in the days when her late husband practised as a doctor in Northbridge. Barbara was now vastly improving

in her needlework as she was in her writing, though both had still the clumsy touch of a beginner about them ; but in listening to her conversation it was difficult for any one to believe that she had lost her memory at all. There was no trace of the beginner in her tongue, if there was in her fingers.

It was one of those wet summer days with a west wind, which makes one feel all the time that one's face is being washed in soft water. Barbara meant to go out of doors shortly in spite of the rain : but she would not enjoy the soft-water baptism properly on account of the grey gauze veil. Just now the whole part of her face was exposed : and Mrs. Windybank sighed as she saw the difference between the lovely hair and eyes and the scars beneath them. Nevertheless it comforted her to perceive that the disfigurement was considerably less now than it had been when the girl first came to Northbridge. But it still was a disfigurement—there was no denying that : and it would continue so for a long time to come.

There came a pause in the trivial conversation, and Mrs. Windybank's heart began to beat more quickly, as all our hearts beat when we are going to say something which we have prepared beforehand, even if that something has nothing disagreeable about it : and they beat at ten times the speed when it has. But the mistress of The Chevrons had never turned from a duty yet ; and she was not going to begin at her age.

'My dear,' she began, 'I was just noticing how much less your scars show now than they did a few months ago. Dr. Culpepper was evidently right when he assured us that they would entirely disappear in time.' Mrs. Windybank was one of those wise women who always preface a disagreeable remark by an *hors-d'œuvre* of compliment : it is a plan of campaign greatly to be recommended.

The beautiful eyes lit up with pleasure. 'Oh! Granny, I am so thankful to hear you say that. I was beginning to think myself that I was growing a little less hideous, but of course I am a prejudiced observer. But then so are you, if it comes to that!'

'Always prejudiced in favour of the real Barbara—the Barbara who is dressed up for the time being in a garment of flesh. But I am still quite competent to judge how that garment is looking.'

'It is looking a bit patchy at present: but I really do believe that it is going to get right in time. And that is why I am so anxious not to let anybody but you and Auntie see it in its present state. Auntie doesn't understand, but I know you will. People always remember you as you were when they saw you first; and if they first see me as I am now, they'll always see me like that, however much better-looking I may get.'

'How do you know that, my dear?'

'I do know it, but I can't tell you how. It is one of the many things that I seem to know by instinct without in the least remembering where I learned them. That is what is so queer about my lost, stolen, or strayed memory: it is no use at all when you come to causes, but quite a good hand at effects. Therefore you see, Granny darling, it seems a pity to write myself down for good and all as a gargoyle, when really I may blossom into quite a decent statue in time. Not of course into a Clytie or a Venus of Milo: Auntie says I never was in that *galère* at the best of times: but I may develop into a Dancing Faun or a Laocoon or something neat yet not gaudy in that line, if you only give me time.'

Mrs. Windybank gave the little squeal which she always uttered when shocked. 'Oh! my love, what dreadful statues to compare yourself to. Not at all nice.'

Barbara laughed her ringing laugh. It had come back since she had known Harold Timpany ; but until then it seemed to have been lost in the accident, with her memory. 'Much nicer than gargoyles, Granny, and nothing like so plain. You see I'm only at the gargoyle stage now ; so the Dancing Faun and the Laocoon will be quite a pleasant change.'

Mrs. Windybank changed the subject : but only apparently so. 'My love, have you noticed that young Mr. Timpany seems to admire you a good deal ?'

The girl blushed, and her grandmother noticed how pretty was the blush in the unscarred part of her face. 'Yes, Granny dear, I own my attention has been called to it, though I was afraid I was perhaps flattering myself : but if you have caught sight of it too, it cannot be altogether my own invention.'

'It certainly isn't, my dear. Most young girls would have been sure of it some time ago.'

The blush became too deep for beauty. 'Oh ! but you see I am not like other girls. It seems almost too good to be true that anybody should admire me.'

Mrs. Windybank felt that she had blundered in her tactics, and endeavoured to repair her error. 'You certainly are not like other girls in your freedom from all petty vanity and silly affectation. What I meant was that you have none of that idiotic conceit which causes some girls to make such fools of themselves by imagining that every man they meet is in love with them.'

Barbara laughed ruefully. 'No, I certainly am not like that : how could I be with such a face as mine ? But I don't think that shows any special virtue on my part : I dare say I should have been as vain as the rest if I'd had anything to be vain about.'

'I don't think so, my love : you are of too sweet and humble a nature.'

‘I fear my humility is compulsory, Granny, and so ought not to be counted to me for righteousness.’

Mrs. Windybank sighed. ‘There is no doubt that beauty is a great temptation, my child : and when I see the harm it sometimes does to its possessors, I feel I ought to thank God that He in His Almighty Wisdom saw fit to withhold from me this dangerous gift. Still that is not a *Te Deum* that any woman could sing at one-and-twenty ; and not many later. But *re* young Mr. Timpany, as the lawyers say, though I own I have no idea what *re* means : there is no doubt that he is very much in love with you, and probably intends asking you to be his wife : the greatest honour that any man can pay to any woman. And I want to ask you, my love—I feel it is my duty, albeit a painful duty, to ask you—whether you think it is fair for this young man to allow himself to make you a proposal of marriage before he has seen your face ?’

The said face went very white : its whiteness was visible even through the scars. ‘Oh, Granny, that would spoil everything ! I’m sure Harold would leave off being in love with me if once he saw my disfigurement. And it is so wonderful for any one with a face like mine to have a lover at all, that I feel I couldn’t bear to lose him.’ And Barbara’s speech ended in a gasp which was perilously like a sob.

Mrs. Windybank heard the sob and it cut her to the quick : but she also heard ‘it is so wonderful to have a lover at all, that I couldn’t bear to lose him’—not ‘it is so wonderful to have Harold Timpany, that I could not bear to lose him’—and her wise old heart recognised the difference, and rejoiced. She saw that it was the office of lover that Barbara loved—not the temporary holder of the office ; that the girl’s feeling for Harold was cosmic, not individual, though Mrs.

Windybank would never have expressed the knowledge in these terms.

‘I quite understand your feelings, Barbara dear,’ she continued, ‘and I fully enter into them. But, after all, yours are not the only feelings concerned : there are young Mr. Timpany’s feelings to be considered as well. And they are by far the deeper of the two at present,’ she added to herself : but she was too wise a woman to utter this rider aloud.

‘How do you mean, Granny ?’

‘I mean that Mr. Timpany has fallen in love with you before seeing what you call your disfigurement : I believe that he will love you just the same after he has seen it : sooner or later he must see it, and I certainly think he ought to do so before he has placed himself in a position from which he could not honourably withdraw.’

‘You mean it would not be fair to accept him as a pretty woman, and marry him as a plain one—as Leah and Rachel between them did to Jacob ?’ Barbara was always quick to catch a point.

‘Just so, my dear. Personally I do not think it will make the slightest difference to him.’

‘But you think he ought to have the chance of gracefully backing out while there is yet time.’

‘If you choose to put it like that, my dear—yes. Of course you can assure him—or perhaps I had better assure him—that Dr. Culpepper has no doubt at all that in time your scars will entirely disappear. But in the meantime he ought to know exactly what they are like before he asks you to marry him.’

Barbara nodded. For the time her reason triumphed over her feelings : in her way she was as shrewd as her grandmother. ‘And there’s more in it than that, Granny dear. I can see for myself, without any one telling me, that with my veil over my nose and mouth, and only my hair and eyes showing, I really am a

pretty girl ; in fact—to speak quite plainly—a very pretty girl : but—according to Aunt Caroline and my old photographs—the lower part of my face was never altogether a success. Therefore at present Harold thinks me much better-looking than I was even before my accident : so that when Dr. Culpepper's prophecy is fulfilled and I regain my normal looks, even my normal looks won't come up to what poor Harold has been led to expect. So I am afraid you are right, Gran, though I must own it 's jolly hard luck on me !' After which saying the poor girl rushed out of the room and locked herself up in her rose-papered bedroom to have a good cry.

But although her grandmother's words had been most unacceptable, Barbara's innate common-sense could not fail to see the justice of them. She convicted herself of selfishness in that she had been so wrapped up in her own sentiments that she had forgotten those of her lover except in so far as they were related to herself. Now that her grandmother had opened her eyes, she saw that there were two distinct points of view ; in fact not only distinct from, but actually opposed to, each other. If she showed herself to Harold as for the present she was, it was quite possible that she might lose a lover : if on the other hand she allowed him to propose to her before she removed the grey veil which hid such a multitude of deficiencies, she might gain a husband ; though even then there was no guarantee that the lover would remain. And a husband who is not also a lover is a poor bargain indeed for any daughter of Eve !

But if Harold asked her to marry him because he found her fair to see, and then discovered that instead she was terrible to look upon—so she exaggerated her disfigurement to herself—he was in a sorry plight indeed ; for Barbara knew him well enough to feel sure that if once he had paid his vows to her, he would

never disappoint her though it were to his own hindrance—only he would have called it ‘playing the game.’ And herein she was right. In spite of his insufferable infallibility there was a great deal of good in Harold Timpany.

After much searching of heart and many secret tears, Barbara made up her mind to put her fate to the touch and win or lose it all. Which showed considerable courage on her part, as Harold meant a great deal to her. Still she felt she, too, must ‘play the game,’ and must not allow her lover to place himself in a false position if she could help it. Her only doubt was as to when the fatal deed should be done. She longed to have one more afternoon of triumphant beauty, even if the beauty owed its existence to a grey gauze veil : and yet if once Harold had made love to her by word, as for many weeks now he had been doing by deed, it would be too late. He could not then draw back without losing what a man of an earlier age or a nobler breed would have called his honour, and what Harold spoke of as his self-respect.

It was a difficult point to decide. And what augmented the difficulty was that it must be decided at once, since this was Friday and Harold was coming to The Chevrons on the Saturday afternoon.

‘Shall I let him see me without my veil to-morrow ; or shall I give myself one more day of happiness ?’ Barbara kept on inquiring of herself and receiving no reply. ‘It has been so heavenly to be pretty, and it will be so awful to be hideous again ! But I must do the straight thing by Harold, he has done so much for me. Since I have known him I have felt like a real girl, with all a real girl’s love of fun and admiration : but before he came I felt like a hideous old hag who had never known what it was to be young and happy. And now I shall feel like that for the rest of my life, I suppose. Oh dear, oh dear, I wish I had stayed

contentedly at home with Mother and Willie, and never come within twenty thousand miles of the railway from London to Manchester! I dare say I was really happy enough; and I certainly didn't know when I was well off. It was silly of me to make myself so ill fretting about Father that they had to send me over here. I should have been far better off where I was, and I dare say I should have got over it in time—people always do. And at any rate, though I may never have been really pretty, I should have been a good deal better than this.'

And the tears began to flow afresh.

After a time Barbara's common-sense again asserted itself. 'It's rather silly of me to go on crying like this,' she said to herself: 'it won't do any good, and it spoils my eyes, which, with my hair, are now my only stock-in-trade. If my eyes get spoilt too, I am indeed bereft. Crying never improves anything—least of all one's personal appearance; so I'd better play the man and leave off.' Which she promptly did.

Then her thoughts ran on. 'Now when shall I let Harold see my face? That's the question before the House at present. It would be heavenly to be pretty for one day longer: yet the fat would be in the fire if he actually made love to me before he had seen me—which it is now quite on the cards that he may do any day, and after my experience I don't want any more fat or any more lean in the fire. I've had enough fire as it is!'

For a time Barbara cogitated deeply, carefully weighing the pros and cons. Then a brilliant idea struck her. 'I know what I'll do: I'll toss up; heads I give myself another week's grace, and tails I show Harold my face to-morrow.' Whereupon she seized a halfpenny that was lying on her dressing-table, and spun it in the air. When she went to pick

it up she saw Britannia with her trident staring her in the face. Tails had won.

Barbara could not remember Willie saye as a dim and distant little boy playing in the garden at The Chevrons ; neither could she recall any of his numerous friends who used to hang about his home after he grew up, and flirt with his sister ; but her former intercourse with youthful masculine minds had left its impression upon her walk and conversation nevertheless ; and she thought and said many things which she would not have thought and said if all her life had been spent—as at present all her remembered life had been spent—with her aunt and grandmother at Northbridge.

The next afternoon Harold motored over to Northbridge, and suggested a row on the river before tea : with which suggestion Barbara at once fell in. Off they went down the little street that was really a staircase, Harold constantly stretching out his hand to help his companion—an assistance which was totally unnecessary, but which it pleased him as much to give as it pleased her to receive. Then they crossed the road and stepped into the old boat which belonged to Mrs. Windybank and was always moored there, and started down the stream, Harold rowing whilst Barbara steered. He was in high spirits ; but she was depressed by the memory of Britannia sitting triumphant on her own side of the halfpenny.

‘ I say, it is jolly, isn’t it ? ’ Harold remarked, as they went lazily down stream : ‘ the sort of thing that makes you feel good and peaceful. Northbridge isn’t the kind of spot I fancy, I admit : too inconvenient and musty for my taste : but I can’t deny that it’s a good one to look at if it’s a poor one to go. Not the place for a home, but ripping for a picture postcard.’

‘ You don’t do it justice, Harold.’ (For some time they had been Harold and Barbara to each other—

when Mrs. and Miss Windybank were not present.) 'It is perfectly lovely—an absolute gem. I adore every stick and stone in it.'

'Well I couldn't go as far as that : but I go to the length of confessing that there is something in it that I adore, though it isn't a stick or a stone. Anything but.'

Barbara felt that Britannia was gazing sternly at her from the wrong side of the halfpenny and hastened to get on to safer ground. If Harold were going on like this, the veil must come off at once. 'I don't believe you appreciate the atmosphere of the place,' she said, hastily changing the subject.

'You mean the climate. Oh ! it isn't at all bad for the Midlands. Quite salubrious I should say, though of course not as balmy as the sunny south. But for any one who isn't obliged to live near a big business centre like Mercheester, give me Brighton or Eastbourne : something bright and cheerful and up to date, don't you know ? Ever been there ?'

'Never. And I don't think I should like them if I had. They'd be too bustling and noisy and what you call "gay" for me.'

'Just you wait and see, and don't refuse your goods till you've sampled them. You must go there some day and stay at the best hotel in the place, and do it in fine style : and you'll like it well enough, I'm sure. Still, situation and climate aren't everything, I admit : and I don't believe there is any place on earth, bar none, that I couldn't be happy in with a certain person.' And Harold leaned forward towards the veil, with obvious love in his handsome blue eyes.

Again Barbara made a struggle to get on to safer ground. 'I don't mean that kind of physical atmosphere. I mean the mental or spiritual atmosphere that hangs about certain places. It is a subject which Granny and I are particularly strong upon, and means a great deal to us.'

‘As how?’

‘When we go into a house we know in a minute whether the spiritual atmosphere of that house is good or not, and whether or not we could be happy there. Some houses welcome us and some repel us, and yet we can’t in the least say why. I suppose the people who live in a house create its atmosphere in the first place: but it lingers there long after they have left. I shouldn’t like to live in a house where very wicked people had lived, for fear I myself should catch the wickedness and become wicked too.’

Harold laughed. ‘Well, it seems getting a bit too thick if you cannot engage a house without asking for its character, the same as if it were a servant. Think of saying, “Number 12 Blank Street is sober, obliging, and good-tempered, very clean in its work and person”: or “Number 8 Dash Square is competent and efficient, but not altogether trustworthy.” It would add considerably to the worries of domestic life.’

Barbara was conscious of the faint irritation which we all feel when our grave statements are received with levity. It is always more or less of a shock when deep calls unto deep and then finds extreme shallowness at the other end of the telephone.

‘Of course it sounds absurd when you put it in that way,’ she said: ‘but then so does everything if you begin to make fun of it. I suppose you could make even the Ten Commandments sound ridiculous if you tried. But do you mean to tell me that old places like Northbridge don’t feel to you to have a different atmosphere from new and bustling business towns?’

‘Quite different, because the sanitary arrangements are so inferior.’

Barbara’s irritation increased. ‘And don’t you feel when you go into a church that the atmosphere there is quite different from the atmosphere of an ordinary house?’

Harold's handsome blue eyes twinkled with merriment. 'Quite different, because churches are always so confoundedly draughty. And talking of churches reminds me of one of their principal uses, and that is the splicing of people who are head-over-ears in love with one another.'

Barbafa could put Britannia off no longer : she felt that the moment had come. And—so greatly are momentous actions influenced by transitory feelings—the girl's passing irritation against Harold made obedience to Britannia's behest far less difficult than it would otherwise have been. Strong in this irritation she made the fatal plunge.

'Oh ! Harold, I want to know if you don't think my face is much better than it was ?' (She knew perfectly well that he was no judge, as he had never seen it as it was; but this appeared to her a light and easy way of introducing the hateful subject.) 'Dr. Culpepper assured me that it would get quite all right in time; and Granny and Auntie and I think his words are coming true.' Saying which Barbara bravely threw off the grey veil that was wrapped round the lower part of her face, and exposed that face to the clear afternoon light.

There was a moment's awful silence, whilst Harold went deadly pale. No expression of his handsome countenance was lost upon the trembling girl. She waited for his verdict in silence. Her superior breeding had enabled her to treat even so serious a matter easily and lightly : he had no such resource to support him in this trying moment.

'Oh, I say !' he exclaimed at last, vainly endeavouring to hide the effects of the shock upon him. 'It is a bad business ! I'd no idea that—that—the beastly thing had knocked you about as much as this. By Jove, it *was* rough luck on you !'

Barbara could read him like a book. She had had

her answer. Her lover had been weighed in the balances and had been found grievously wanting. If he had chattered on for an hour he could not have made things clearer to her than they were now. But her breeding still stood her in good stead : she had not been born Mrs. Windybank's granddaughter for nothing. ' Yes, it is bad, isn't it ? ' she went on, in order to cover her companion's confusion : ' but it is nothing to what it was : and every one assures me that it will eventually get absolutely right. But it's rather rough on me in the meantime, isn't it ? '

' I should just think it was.' There was pity—abundant pity—in the handsome blue eyes : but every trace of pity's kinsman, love, had vanished.

' But if it hadn't been for you,' continued Barbara with gracious courage, ' I should have had no face left to be disfigured at all : so I must be grateful that things are no worse than they are ; and thank God, and take courage.'

And with manners more worthy of a duchess than of a country doctor's daughter, Barbara succeeded in putting the discomfited Timpany entirely at his ease, and beguiled the rest of the afternoon with light and easy conversation. But all the same she felt that her fate was sealed, and that no man would look upon her with love in his eyes any more for ever : for ' the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'

It is one of the sad things in this life that so few people possess the power of making us happy, and so many persons the power of making us unhappy. Thus Harold Timpany would never have been able, had he married her, to make Barbara happy : he was not made of fine enough stuff. But he had the power of making her very unhappy indeed : not so much by what he did, as by what he stood for. In his rejection of her scarred face, she saw her rejection by all mankind.

CHAPTER VI

THE PASSING OF THE YEARS

SWIFTLY and peacefully the uneventful years passed by after Barbara had settled down at The Chevrons—all the more swiftly because they were uneventful. It is the time in which much happens that passes slowly, because there is so much to mark its progress. The uneventful days run one into the other imperceptibly, until we see no difference between them, and so never realise how many of them have gone by, nor how short a time it takes for the sum of them to mount up to a year, and for the years to mount up into decades.

After Harold Timpany's disappearance—for he did not come many times to Northbridge when once he had seen poor Barbara without her veil—no more suitors found their way to The Chevrons. Barbara finally discarded the grey veil when she saw the mischief it was capable of doing : and without it, alas ! she gained no fresh lovers. She was too proud to show that she noticed this defection : but the iron of it entered into her soul. Still it is not only weapons that are fashioned out of iron ; tonics are made of the same material : and the iron that entered into Barbara's soul strengthened as well as hurt. At first she fretted—as any young girl would fret—that her disfigurement shut her off, for a time at any rate, from the youthful joys of flirtation and love-making : and then gradually her nature attuned itself to higher things, and she realised that there is deep and true

happiness possible for a woman quite apart from the praise of men.

For one thing she was far cleverer after her accident than she had been before, because she was so much better read. Books had opened a new world to her : and her mind had become to her a kingdom in a sense that it had never been in her earlier days. She had always possessed the Windybank keenness of intellect : but she had never really cultivated this possession until she was let loose in her grandfather's library at The Chevrons, and allowed to browse there at will. And then she had been a much better woman since she was afflicted ; which is a very old-fashioned reason to proffer for increased happiness, but nevertheless a sound one. ' To be good is to be happy ' is a saying so trite as to be commonplace and banal : but it contains a solid and undeniable truth. And it would be truer still if for the word *good* we substituted the word *religious*. And by religious we mean no fulfilment of particular rites or acceptance of peculiar dogmas—no methodical rule of conduct or ordered manner of life ; but the possession of a sixth sense, the power of a fourth dimension—the citizenship of a city which hath foundations, the succession to an inheritance which fadeth not away. The religious man is not merely—not even necessarily—a better man than the irreligious one : but he has greater gifts, wider stores of knowledge, vastly increased powers, and the entrance into a glorious kingdom which for the other does not exist. Therefore he must of necessity be the happier man of the two.

To know and love Mrs. Windybank was in itself a liberal education : and it was an education of which her grandchild availed herself to the full. Although Barbara learned much worldly wisdom and acquired considerable shrewdness from her aunt, it was her grandmother who instructed her in the things which

really matter : and this not so much by the spoken word, as by the showing forth in her daily life of the faith once delivered to the saints. Harriet Windybank knew little of dogma and still less of doctrine : the history and the heresies of the Church were alike sealed books to her : her religious life consisted simply and solely of an intense personal devotion to a living, personal Saviour : her one rule of conduct was to endeavour to do what would be pleasing in His sight. Although she had married and been the mother and grandmother of children, the romance of Mrs. Windybank's life lay in her religion. To no holy and cloistered nun was the Heavenly Bridegroom more real and more adorable and more altogether lovely than He was to this widow of a country doctor in a little provincial town : to no mediæval pilgrim was the soul's adventure more exciting and more glorious than it was to this gentle old lady of the Victorian era.

'My dear,' she said to Barbara one day, when the latter had been repeating how she wished she had arrived in England in the summer, and then there would have been no fog and so no railway accident : 'has it ever occurred to you how wonderful it was of our Blessed Lord to bid the women of Jerusalem pray that their flight should not be in the winter ? Just imagine His thinking of a little thing like that ! Why, it is a sort of thing that you 'd hardly expect a man to think of at all—only a woman—the misery of flying all over the country in very cold weather, especially for very little children. But *He* thought of it. Just as when He saw the disciples after the Resurrection, the first thing He asked them was, had they had their breakfast ? Just what a mother would have asked ; a father would hardly have thought of it. But he was tenderer than any man : tenderer even than any mother : and yet He was God.'

‘Yes : it is all very wonderful,’ replied Barbara softly.

‘It is, my dear : and yet all so simple. Christ is the answer to all the puzzles of life, if only people could understand. They are always inventing new remedies for all the evils in the social and political and religious worlds : and forget that there is only one Remedy for everything—and that is Christ Himself. For my part I don’t take much interest in all the modern talk about Socialism and the Brotherhood of Man and things of that kind, which are supposed to be panaceas for every human ill. What we want is not liberty or equality or fraternity—not education or the enfranchisement of Woman or the universal rights of Man—but Christ dwelling in our hearts. When we have got that, then all the other things will follow of themselves.’

‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you,’ quoted Barbara, who read her Bible as well as other books.

‘Exactly : that is literally true. But people are in such a hurry to make sure of “all these things,” that they have not time left for the seeking of the Kingdom.’

‘It seems stupid of them,’ said Barbara thoughtfully : ‘when if they would only begin at the other end, they would get all the other things thrown in. But it isn’t only worldly people who are stupid in this way, Granny ; religious people bother their heads about a great many things besides their love for Christ.’

‘I know they do, my dear : and I can’t help thinking it is a pity. I feel sure that S. Paul knew what he was talking about when he said he was determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified : and if only other people took a leaf out of S. Paul’s book, the world would be a great deal better than it is.’

Religious teaching—like everything else—was new

to Barbara : and she was fortunate in having so experienced and at the same time so simple a teacher as her grandmother. In after years, when she went out into the world and heard its ceaseless cryings after novelty and saw its countless altars raised to unknown gods, she realised this : and gave God thanks.

¶ About a year after Barbara's coming to Northbridge Hugh Kinfell's battery was ordered out to India. He was very thankful for this ; as he hated staying on in places where he had once been so happy with Viola. They accentuated by force of contrast his present misery. Naturally he had heard nothing further of his wife, though he had lived in constant expectation of doing so : and all attempts to trace her had proved vain.

The idea that Viola was no longer alive had indeed occurred to him : but only to be rejected on the grounds—already pointed out by her aunt and by Barbara—that though she might hide herself living, she could hardly do so if dead. It seemed impossible that the body of so beautiful and distinguished-looking a woman should vanish utterly leaving no trace behind : at least so Lord Kinfell thought : and the detectives he had employed agreed with him. So gradually he came to the conclusion that his wife had thrown him finally on one side like a worn-out glove, and had no further use for him : and that all that was now left for him was to accept the undignified position with what grace he could. And India certainly offered more scope for this grace than did his old home and his former surroundings, where every stick and stone spoke to him of Viola, and of his egregious failure to make her happy.

Just before starting for India, Kinfell went to Northbridge to bid Mrs. Windybank and Caroline good-bye. He insisted on spending the night at the old-fashioned inn overlooking the black-and-white

town-hall (which town-hall was built on pillars, the market-place being fashioned out of the space below), because he had to leave so early in the morning that he refused to awaken The Chevrons at so unearthly an hour ; but he passed a long afternoon and evening in the company of his wife's aunt and grandmother, and afforded them a great deal of innocent happiness in so doing.

But he did not see Barbara. She was still too sore from the defection of Harold Timpany to contemplate with equanimity the idea of facing any male stranger without her veil : and she had registered a vow in her own mind never again to shelter her vanity under its disguising folds. So—in spite of all that her aunt and grandmother urged to the contrary—Barbara persisted in hiding herself in her own room during Hugh's visit to The Chevrons.

Harold had taught her—perhaps too thoroughly—how severely the masculine eye regards any personal disfigurement, and how harshly it deals with it : and she was already too much interested in the somewhat romantic figure of her cousin's rejected husband to run the risk of finding in his eyes the same disfavour as she had found in young Timpany's. So she decided to keep out of his way altogether.

To say that Barbara was in love with Lord Kinfell would be most untrue and most unjust : she would have been as horrified as her grandmother at the mere idea of falling in love with another woman's husband : but owing to her accident and consequent loss of memory, there was more of the schoolgirl in Barbara than in most young women of her age : and thus it happened that she cherished a secret and schoolgirlish hero-worship for the unhappy young soldier who had been so highly extolled by her aunt and grandmother, and so abominably treated by his wife. She had no recollection of ever meeting any young man save

Harold Timpany and the indifferent swains of North-bridge ; and the latter, after one glance at her face, generally let her alone : therefore it is not surprising that a man enveloped in the threefold glamour of rank, misfortune, and soldiership—and a man, moreover, in whose praise her grandmother and aunt were always chanting pæans—should stand out as a hero in comparison with these duller and lesser lights.

Most girls go through this phase of hero-worship in their early youth—a phase as different from love as is moonlight from the blaze of noon. But men are often apt to confuse the two, and thereby fall into grievous error. Yet most girls know—and most women too, if they have not forgotten—that this feeling is as innocent as the affection of a child, though haloed by the light of a girl's romance : and that the idea of marriage with the idol partakes of the nature of sacrilege. Surely it was ignorance of this feeling that caused certain persons of the baser sort to confound Charlotte Brontë's girlish adoration of her tutor, with the love of a grown woman for a married man ; and thus to do despite to the memory of the great novelist. True, she was a woman in years, and a man in literary prowess : but, owing to her narrow life and limited experience, she was still at heart a girl.

And so it was with Barbara Lane. Her lack of consciousness of any former phase of existence left her far more youthful than her actual years justified ; and she adored Kinfell with the unreasoning adoration of a girl of fifteen. Unnoticed by her loving relations, she always placed a vase of flowers in front of a large silver-framed photograph of her hero which stood upon the tail-end of the semi-grand piano in the drawing-room, and which he had given to Miss Windybank at the latter's earnest request. Barbara hated her cousin Viola for the way in which the latter had treated her husband : and she adored that husband

for the way in which he had been treated : so that in time it came to pass that the two strongest feelings in the girl's heart were adoration of her hero and detestation of his wife. And her detestation was intensified by consuming envy of the cousin who had been so doubly blessed with woman's two greatest gifts, beauty and love : and had used them to such unworthy ends. The poor girl used to look at her face in the mirror, and compare her lot with that of her cousin about whose loveliness she had heard so much. Her hair and eyes had been like Viola's when they both were children—at least so her grandmother said : but there the likeness had ended. There could be still less family resemblance now between the lovely face which had played such havoc with Hugh Kinfell, and the disfigured features in the looking-glass. And still less resemblance was there, thought the girl, between her own heart, longing to lavish all its treasures of girlish devotion at the feet of her idol, and the hard heart of the spoilt beauty who had deliberately wrecked a good man's life. Barbara yearned to see her cousin face to face and tell her what she thought of her : she had a score to settle with Lady Kinfell, and she meant to settle it even if she had to wait years and years : for she still refused to believe—as Kinfell refused to believe—that Viola was dead.

So it came to pass that when Hugh paid his farewell visit to The Chevrons, Barbara shut herself up in her own room, and refused to come down. She felt it would kill her to see in her hero's eyes the same look that she had seen in Harold Timpany's, and in the eyes of the young men of Northbridge. She did not know—how should she ?—that Viola had taught Hugh to hate and distrust physical beauty almost as much as he had once loved and believed in it ; that to his embittered mind all fair women were false and shallow : nor did she know that his own misery had given him a

keen insight into and a deep sympathy with the sufferings of all those who were in any way afflicted or distressed. “

Miss Windybank succinctly explained to Hugh the reason of Barbara’s non-appearance, throwing in the Timpany episode as a modern instance of the ways of men.

‘What a cad!’ exclaimed Lord Kinfell. ‘I should have liked to have the kicking of him down that old stone street into the river.’

‘It would have done him good,’ said Miss Windybank. ‘a world of good: though I don’t know whether he altogether deserved it in that particular instance, though I’ve no doubt he often has and often will in others. But there is no good shutting one’s eyes to facts: and one cannot deny that Barbara—though a dear girl—is disfigured by her accident.’

‘That makes it all the worse,’ retorted Lord Kinfell in his eagerness to support the cause of all who were desolate and oppressed.

‘And you must bear in mind,’ said Mrs. Windybank, ‘that Mr. Timpany had never before seen Barbara without her veil. I did not like the young man—I considered him ill-bred—but we must do him justice.’

‘I never approved of that veil-business,’ remarked Caroline ‘never: and I always said so. I think it is best for men to see the worst at once, and then they can take you or leave you as they like: and if they leave you, all the better for you! But to do all one’s love-making through a thick veil is too oriental for my taste: and often ends in trouble, as in the case of Jacob and Leah.’

‘I hope the poor child didn’t really care for the bounder,’ said Hugh.

Mrs. Windybank shook her head. ‘Not for him, only for what he stood for—youth and love and ad-

miration and pleasure and all the things that young girls crave. These she enjoyed and these she misses now that young Mr. Timpany has gone out of her life : but she and Love have never yet come face to face.'

'So much the better for her !' exclaimed Kinfell bitterly : 'she will curse the day when they do. The best we can hope for her is that she will never meet him.'

'That 's what I say,' assented Miss Windybank : 'Love and Happiness never dwell in the same house. When Love comes in at the door, Happiness disappears up the chimney.'

Her mother smiled : 'I think you are both mistaken. It is not Love but Love's counterfeit that is destructive to Happiness : and it is often very difficult to distinguish between the two.'

Hugh's short visit to The Chevrons passed all too quickly ; and Barbara succeeded in concealing herself until he was gone. But she saw him though he did not see her, and gazed at his coming and retreating form through her curtained window. And the sight of her hero in the flesh increased her girlish adoration of him, and riveted the chains which already bound her half-awakened soul to his.

The inner life of most of us is sustained by bread eaten in secret, the very existence of which is often unsuspected by any of our friends : but without this secret nutriment our souls would starve. The more imaginative we are, the more of this spiritual food we require : and the less eventful our lives, the greater becomes our need. Therefore Mrs. Windybank and her grandchild required more of it than did the practical and unromantic Caroline : and the peaceful and even tenor of their lives at Northbridge served to increase their need. For they were of those to whom the life is more than meat and the body than raiment.

The secret garden of Mrs. Windybank's soul was the garden of the Lord. Her religion amply supplied all her mental and spiritual wants, and filled her cup to overflowing with the romance and beauty and wonder of life. To those women whose lives are hid with Christ in God, there is no such thing as growing old. The longer they live, the more the glory and the wonder of existence increase, and the more passionate becomes their devotion to the Master Whom they serve. He more than satisfies their craving for romance and beauty and unalterable happiness : He more than fulfils their highest ideals of all that their Beloved should be : and with Him beside them the so-called Valley of the Shadow is transformed into an anti-chamber leading to the greatest and best adventure of all—the entrance into a life of eternal youth and joy.

But Barbara was as yet in spiritual leading-strings, and required the help of the things which are seen and temporal. She still needed the assistance of human love to lead her to the realisation of the Divine. And being just at the age when girlish ideals are apt to materialise, she embodied her ideals in the person of Lord Kinfell. His rank held a certain glamour for her : his sad history considerably more : and as she was cut off by her disfigurement from the attentions of other men, she enshrined Hugh in a place in her heart from which he was never to be dethroned.

And so the years passed on with the speed of uneventful periods. They wrought but little change in Mrs. Windybank, her mind being so set on things above that earthly cares had no power to touch her : Caroline changed some of her copper locks for silver ones, and—like Freedom—slowly broadened down ; and she continued vigorous and active, with her natural strength in no ways abated : but it was with Barbara that the passing years dealt most kindly.

She still remained very thin, but, as she was young, she was none the worse for that. As far as her health was concerned she had quite outgrown the effects of the accident, and was as strong and well as she had ever been ; and even as far as her appearance was concerned, time had helped her considerably. All traces of scars gradually disappeared, though the outline of her features had been permanently thickened : but only those who had known her and the beauty of her complexion before her face was injured, would realise that it was in any way the worse. Hers was still quite an average complexion, as complexions go ; though it had lost the peculiarly delicate colouring of the typical Windybank skin. Any one now meeting her for the first time would have called her a distinctly attractive woman : her tall slim figure and fine eyes and hair saw to that : but to the bucolic mind of Northbridge to be once disfigured was to be always disfigured ; and as it had once seen her, so Northbridge saw her still. The removal of first impressions is always a difficult operation : and in an agricultural neighbourhood wellnigh an impossible one.

But the looking-glass was open to conviction, and was therefore able to convey to the girl the comforting truth that she was no longer set apart from her fellows. She was now quite as good-looking as most of her contemporaries ; in fact better-looking than the majority of them ; but the fruits of her tribulation had not been wasted, and the humility and sympathy which she had learned in the school of adversity had become integral parts of her character. Therefore she had attained a beauty of expression which she had never possessed before. Had she but known it, the loving and tender woman who now dwelt at Northbridge was far better-looking than the crude young girl who came to England after her father's death, and took

the ill-fated train from London to Merchester : but although her health had regained its former vigour, her lost memory had never returned ; so that she had no recollection of what she had looked like before her accident. Now and again dim memories of her childhood returned, roused by the sight of some childish haunt : which rooted Dr. Culpepper the more firmly in his belief that a return to New Zealand would restore Barbara's lost memory intact. But Willie was married, and his mother had married again—this time a well-to-do widower with a growing family : so that there seemed no permanent place for Barbara in her old home, and it was too long and expensive a journey to be undertaken for a mere visit. Therefore the girl stayed on at The Chevrons, much to her grandmother and aunt's delight, content—at any rate for some time longer—to forego the last chance of recovering her memory.

Before Kinfell left The Chevrons, he asked his wife's grandmother to write to him sometimes. He had fallen in love with Mrs. Windybank at first sight. She satisfied the mother-craving of his heart more than any one had satisfied it since his mother died : and he felt that having once found her, he could not easily let her go. So a regular correspondence was started between Mrs. Windybank and her grandson-in-law, which was a source of real happiness to them both.

Every summer The Chevrons was either shut up or let, while its inhabitants took a furnished house at some seaside town in Wales. In the old days Mrs. Windybank and her daughter used to spend these summer holidays in hotels : but in the first years after Barbara's accident nothing would induce the poor girl to go among strangers : so the Windybanks fell into the custom of removing their household *en masse* to a furnished house, and they clung to this custom even after Barbara grew presentable again.

This was a pity, as it prevented them from seeing and mixing with new people : and thus shut up Barbara more and more to the kingdom of her own thoughts and imaginations.

On the way home from one of these yearly migrations, Mrs. Windybank fell foul of an influenza germ : and was laid up for several weeks after her return. Even when her feet were firmly set on the road to recovery she was too weak to do very much, and so asked Barbara to undertake her self-imposed duty of writing to Hugh.

‘ I hardly like to trouble you, my dear,’ she said : ‘ but I really do not feel quite equal to writing to dear Hugh : and I do not like to trouble your aunt, as she has her hands full already with her housekeeping and her garden and her tiresome old mother. I wonder if you would write to him for me.’

Barbara’s face flushed with pleasure. ‘ Of course I will, Granny : I should love to write to him. He won’t like it as well as a letter from you, but it will be better than nothing. You always write such splendid letters, I think.’

Mrs. Windybank shook her head. ‘ Not at all splendid, my dear, but adequate. At any rate my letters *are* letters : while most of the so-called letters of to-day are merely notes—or, rather, telegrams if only they were sent by wire and not by post. You would think to read young people’s letters, that they were charged a penny a word instead of a penny for four ounces.’

Barbara laughed. ‘ You see everything is condensed nowadays, Granny : an ox into a tea-cup, and a biography into an obituary notice, and a letter into a code-word. It saves a lot of trouble, you know.’

‘ It may, my love : but it does so at the expense of much of the poetry and beauty of life. It is very kind of you to offer to write to Hugh in my place, and I am

very grateful to you : but you must write him a nice long letter, and not one of your modern shabby little notes.'

The grey-green eyes twinkled. 'I'll do my best to spread myself, Granny, though spreading has gone quite out of fashion : but I dare say I can do a little, if I try with both hands. I'll add quantities of water to my mental meat-lozenge and turn it into washy soup. Then I shall gain in quantity what I lose in quality.'

'But you must not be washy : Hugh would not like a washy letter. It is amazing to me how he has turned to us since he came to know us : I should have thought he would have avoided any one who was connected with the source of all his trouble, apart from the fact that to him we must appear very dull and humdrum.'

Barbara's brow darkened. 'If I were Hugh I should hate anybody and everybody who was connected with Viola. In fact I hate her as it is : and so long as I live I will never forgive her for the way she treated him and spoiled his life.'

'Hush, hush, my love ! It is terrible to hate any one, and especially any one of your own flesh and blood.'

'I hate her all the more for that. It makes me ashamed when I think that a relation of mine has behaved as vilely as Viola has done.'

Mrs. Windybank sighed. 'Remember she had no mother, poor child.'

'But she had a very good husband ; and she broke his heart. I dare say she'd have broken her mother's heart too, if she'd had the chance, but her father was before her in that.'

'And she was very beautiful,' pleaded Mrs. Windybank : but Barbara naturally disregarded this plea.

'I don't see what that has to do with it, Granny : or, rather, it makes it all the worse : because if one

has been blessed with such a supreme gift as beauty, one ought to spend one's days in giving thanks for it. It is far easier for beautiful people to be good, because they are so much happier than the rest of us.'

'They don't seem to find it so,' remarked Mrs. Windybank drily, 'if history is to be believed.'

'I'm sure I should have been a much nicer woman than I am if I'd been beautiful,' said Barbara with a sigh.

'I do not think you would, my dear: and as a matter of fact I don't see how you could be. But I used to feel as you do when I was young. I had a great admiration for physical beauty, and it was a sore trial to me that I had been denied it. But I gradually came to see that this life is but a preparation for the life to come, and that the beauty that really matters is the beauty of the spiritual body—not the beauty of the natural one. And this lies in our own hands.'

'Do you think it does?'

'Assuredly, my love. The natural body sometimes disguises and even misinterprets the soul which inhabits it: but the spiritual body will be an expression of that soul. Thus every action that we perform—even every thought which we harbour—is either adding to or detracting from the beauty of the spiritual body which will one day be ours.'

'Then according to you, Granny, vanity alone ought to be a guarantee of virtue: let us publish a revised version of the proverb, and say "Vanity is its own reward."'

Mrs. Windybank smiled as she lay back among her pillows. 'So it is my child: both the right sort of vanity and the wrong sort. "Verily they have their reward" is a true saying with regard to all of us: and often we find that our reward is a punishment, as men call it: by which they generally mean a con-

sequence. As you grow older you will see that most of the so-called punishments of God are really nothing but the consequences of our own actions.'

'Like our spiritual personal appearance,' interpolated Barbara.

'Exactly, my dear : what we sow we reap. Nevertheless we spend our lives in sowing thorns, and then cry out because we do not reap a full harvest of grapes : and we say how cruel God is to us : while actually it is we who are cruel to ourselves. But now be off and write your letter : and be sure you write clearly so that Hugh can read what you have written,' added Mrs. Windybank in the true ancestral spirit which refuses to believe that any direct descendant ever attains to full manhood or womanhood, at any rate in the lifetime of the immediate ancestor.

So Barbara tucked up her convalescent grandparent for the latter's afternoon 'nap' (as Mrs. Windybank called it), and went to her own room to write her first letter to Lord Kinfell : and as she went her thoughts turned to Viola, and to all the pain and misery which the latter had so ruthlessly caused by her heartless selfishness ; and she hated the insolent young beauty afresh. Why should this woman—who had proved such a curse to the man who loved her, and who had been heartless and selfish all her life—be dowered with the glorious gift of beauty, whilst she herself—who could love so deeply and so truly, and who would have given all she possessed to be attractive to the eye—be denied this priceless boon, Barbara asked herself ? She felt that if only she had possessed the power to win a man's love, she would have repaid it fourfold—especially if it had been such a man as Hugh Kinfell : yet Viola had been given this priceless gift, and had recklessly and remorselessly thrown it away. Why should such unjust things be, she wondered ? And she made a

vow that when she met Viola face to face she would have it out with her: not knowing that as long as she lived she would never meet Viola face to face. Had she been able to remember the fatal journey to Merchester, perhaps her judgments! would have been less merciless: but that was still wrapped in the impenetrable darkness of utter forgetfulness.

Having once again—as often before—cursed Viola in her heart, Barbara shut herself up in her rose-papered room and wrote the following letter:—

‘DEAR LORD KINFELL,—You will be surprised and I dare say disappointed to hear from me instead of from Granny, but she is not able to write herself this month, so has elected me as her *locum tenens*. We have just come back from our usual annual sojourn in Wales; and on the way home an unoccupied influenza-germ, which was walking up and down like its father the devil seeking whom it might devour, pounced upon dear Granny and laid her low. Up went her temperature, and (like the prophet Nehemiah at the top of the wall) refused to come down for several days: and when at last it consented to descend, there was no more spirit left in her. I am thankful to say that she is now much better and gaining strength every day: but she is not yet quite equal to letter-writing, so bids me do it in her stead. Aunt Caroline and I wanted her to send for Dr. Culpepper from Merchester—the doctor who didn’t bring back my memory after my accident, and who [is awfully clever and a darling into the bargain—but she firmly declined to see anybody except Dr. Dugdale of Northbridge, because he is a distant relation. Not necessarily a guarantee of professional skill, perhaps: still blood is thicker than cough-syrup any day; and her cough shows marked signs of abating under the Dugdale regime.

‘ I do not feel that I am writing to a stranger, as I have heard so much about you from her and Aunt Caroline ; and she always reads your letters aloud, so that we know what you are doing, and how the world is treating you, and everything else that isn’t worth knowing but that is generally all one does know about one’s fellow-creatures. So I will serve you with a similar course of information about myself. We had a pleasant but utterly uneventful time in Wales : that sort of absolute leisure in which one is so busy doing nothing that one hasn’t time to do anything at all—not even to sew a button on one’s glove. We were there for six weeks, in which time I grew dreadfully tired of other people’s furniture ; step Lares and adopted Penates are not very satisfactory household gods, I find. Don’t you hate other people’s furniture ? I do. It has no memories or associations—like me. Which reminds me that in this respect I get no better, but am still like a stained figure in the middle of a plain glass window, with no background whatsoever. My past keeps itself to itself (as the village people pride themselves on doing) with the same dignified reserve as it has exhibited ever since my accident, and so I feel very stupid compared with ordinary people who are supported by back numbers. I think that is why I hate furniture that has no associations : it is so like myself. And we always hate what is like ourselves, don’t you think ? It shows up our own faults and limitations in such a lurid light.

‘ Granny took up all the time and energy of the itinerant influenza-germ, so it left Aunt Caroline and me intact : therefore we are flourishing like a pair of green-bay trees, but doing far more work than a perfect avenue of green bay-trees could accomplish. There is always plenty to do with the garden and the church and the poor people and the household : and Granny being ill makes us busier still. But it is nice

to have lots of occupation after the laborious idleness of a six weeks' holiday; and Auntie and I have strapped on our harness again—if you can dignify such silken trappings by the name of harness—with joy. I can't think how people can bear to live who have nothing to do, can you? I should hate it. I wouldn't lead an idle life, "not if all the crowned heads in Europe went down on their knees to beg me to do it," as an old woman in my district remarked the other day. But though our lives have seemed very full, they don't leave much to write about. Happy women, like happy nations, may be those that have no history: but they don't make the best letter writers. I have really nothing to tell you. My mind is "a blank, my lord," as far as raw material for correspondence goes. I read a good deal and I walk a good deal and I talk a good deal and I think a good deal: but what does all that amount to from the standpoint of history? The world here wags peacefully along in its sleepy old fashion, while certain persons try to awaken it by prophesying that some fine morning the German Emperor on an aeroplane will fly in at the door while Peace flies out of the window: but it laughs at them as scaremongers, and turns round and goes to sleep again *à la* Dr. Watts's sluggard. Which is what you will be doing, if I don't draw my uninspiring remarks to a close.

'With reams of kind messages from Granny and Co. (may I be one of the Co.?).

Very sincerely yours,

BARBARA LANE.'

CHAPTER VII

ON LEAVE

THE letter which Barbara wrote to Lord KinfeU in her grandmother's stead had a far more widely reaching effect than either of them could have imagined. In accordance with that mysterious law whereby personality calls to personality, there was something in Barbara's letter—simple and school-girlish though it might be—which appealed to Hugh : in some strange and inexplicable way it touched a chord to which something in himself responded : but how or why it did this, neither he nor anybody else could have said. Still the fact remained ; and brought with it its consequences.

Hugh hastened to reply to Barbara's letter, and begged her to write to him again. This she was nothing loath to do : and as Mrs. Windybank was considerably older since her encounter with the influenza-germ than she had been before, she was quite willing to hand over to her grandchild her regular correspondence with Lord KinfeU, reserving to herself only the right to send him an occasional letter. This arrangement suited the two young people down to the ground : and their correspondence swiftly ripened into heart-to-heart and soul-to-soul friendship.

It is frequently argued that a platonic friendship between a young man and a young woman is an untenable arrangement : but in this case the fact that one lived in India and the other in the middle of England, diminished the difficulties. A friendship carried on through the post is much more easily kept

upon the platonic plane than one conducted face to face : it is less apt to drop accidentally into something warmer than friendship : so it came to pass that a really intimate bond was instituted between Hugh Kinfell and Barbara Lane, without a word of love-making on either side. At this time the mere idea of love-making would have been equally repellent to them both, as they both clung to the idea that Viola was still alive. Mrs. Windybank and her daughter had long ago come to the conclusion that Viola must be dead, or else they would surely have heard something of her during all these years : and being fully persuaded of this in her own mind, Mrs. Windybank cherished, in the depths of her grandmotherly heart, a secret hope that in time Hugh Kinfell would ask Barbara to fill his wife's vacant place. She had never mentioned this hidden thought to Caroline : until one day Miss Windybank took the bull by the horns—a favourite pastime of the redoubtable Caroline—and clothed her mother's idea in words.

‘ I approve of this correspondence between Barbara and Hugh,’ she remarked, when she and Mrs. Windybank were sitting alone in the white-panelled drawing-room : ‘ it was a very good idea of yours, Mother. It may lead to something.’

‘ Oh, my love, I had no ulterior motive in my mind when I first asked Barbara to write to Hugh for me ! I assure you I hadn't.’ Mrs. Windybank looked quite shocked at the bare suggestion.

‘ Of course you hadn't : nobody would ever suspect you of an ulterior motive in anything : so if you like it better I'll say it was a providential arrangement when Barbara took this Kinfell letter-writing business off your hands. I am sure Hugh likes it better : and it is a great interest to Barbara : and if it leads to anything further in time to come, nobody will be more pleased than I.’

‘ You are not generally an advocate of matrimony, Caroline.’

‘ I know I ’m not; but it is all right for some women, of whom Barbara is one; and to such I should recommend it,’ replied Miss Windybank, as if she were advertising a patent medicine. ‘ It never would have suited me: I haven’t the patience to put up with any man for thirty or forty years: but it suited Lucy right enough—so well that she has gone in for a second dose of it: and in this respect Barbara is like her mother.’

Mrs. Windybank shook her head. ‘ She is not altogether like her mother.’

‘ I didn’t say she was: I only said she is like her with regard to men—wouldn’t think a house properly furnished without one, you know.’

‘ Dear Barbara has far more brains and far more strength of character than her mother ever had,’ persisted Mrs. Windybank: ‘ she has been denied her mother’s graces of person, but has been endowed with far more than her mother’s gifts of character and intellect. I love Lucy, as I love all my children: but I could never pretend that she was as clever as Barbara or as unselfish.’

‘ Probably the one accounts for the other. If Barbara had had her mother’s graces of person, as you call them, she would possibly have been as frivolous and selfish as her mother.’

‘ Oh, my love, don’t speak like that of your own sister! I should not call dear Lucy either selfish or frivolous.’

‘ Call her what you like, Mother: but she was and is both. And so was Julia. And I dare say their good looks were responsible for it.’

‘ But, my love, you were as handsome as your sisters, and you are neither selfish nor frivolous.’

‘ No, Mother, perhaps not: but I was the plainest

of the three, and consequently the least spoiled by my good looks. And, besides, I set less store by them than the others did. It is the same with everything that makes people think they are superior to their fellows : men of genius are just as tiresome as beautiful women. I suppose everybody has so much love to bestow : and if they find in themselves a deserving case—either on account of their wit or their beauty—they joyfully bestow it all on themselves, and consume their own smoke in the form of incense. But if they find no excuse for loving themselves, they spread out their store of affection on their friends and neighbours, and everybody is all the better in consequence.’

‘I do not see why beauty—which is one of God’s greatest gifts—should spoil its possessor as it appears to do,’ sighed Mrs. Windybank : ‘in itself it is a good thing. We are specially told that Rachel was fair to look upon and that Jacob loved her in consequence : and the beauty of his daughters was one of the extra blessings bestowed upon Job to compensate him for all his former trials.’

‘That may be, Mother. But Rachel was a very tiresome sort of person, always worrying herself about not having children, for which she ought to have been most thankful instead of kicking up a hullabaloo and bothering her poor husband to death : as children are nothing but a nuisance and a trouble in my opinion. And then when she got her own way and did have a couple, she made another fuss and died of them : so that even then nothing was right. To my mind her plain sister was worth a dozen of her : so much more competent and efficient.’

‘Jacob did not think so, my dear,’ replied Mrs. Windybank drily. ‘When his time came to die, he talked of his love for Rachel and the goodness of God : but not a word about the efficiency of Leah.’

‘Well, we can’t bother about Jacob’s love-affairs

till we 've settled Hugh Kinfell's : and I must say I wish he'd fall in love with Barbara. For my part, I never wanted any tame pets—not dogs or cats or husbands or children : but Barbara does : she is that sort : and she'd make an excellent wife to any man who had the sense to marry her.'

'She would be a very poor match for Hugh from a worldly point of view,' Mrs. Windybank objected, as usual magnifying the difficulties which lay in the way that led to her heart's desire.

'No worse than Viola !'

'You are wrong there, Caroline : Viola was a Chalfont, and far better born than William Lane's daughter.'

Caroline snorted. 'She was none the better for that ! The Chalfonts were all selfish to the backbone.'

'She might not be any the better morally or spiritually for being born a Chalfont ; but she was certainly the better from a worldly point of view.'

'I thought you never looked at anything from a worldly point of view,' replied Miss Windybank with another snort.

'I try to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, my love : and in doing this I cannot say that I consider Barbara—much as I love her—a suitable wife for Lord Kinfell. Besides, after his sad experience with Viola, I should think he would have had enough of our family.'

'Then let our family make it up to him,' retorted Caroline : 'a hair of the dog that bit him is a proverbial cure.'

'It may be, my love. But for my part, I should prefer a hair of some other animal. If I were Hugh, I should say, "no more Windybanks for me !"'

'Well, Mother, I hear Barbara coming, so the conversation must stop. But I still think that if Hugh were wise he would install Barbara in Viola's place.'

‘ But Viola may not be dead, my dear : and how terrible that would be ! ’

‘ She ’s dead, Mother, never fear ! If she hadn’t been, she would never have kept quiet all this time without giving any trouble to anybody. Still I must say it was very selfish of her to go and die without letting her poor husband know he was free to take another wife. But what can you expect from a Chalfont ? ’

And then Barbara opened the door, and her kinswomen began to talk of something else, with that forced interest which deceives nobody, but which all of us practise in similar circumstances.

The friendship between Hugh and Barbara throve rapidly ; all the more rapidly, perhaps, because it batted upon paper alone, and was not therefore subject to the inevitable shynesses and fluctuations of bodily presence. Our physical selves are more often disguises than expressions of our real selves ; and frequently when we would give all that we have to convey one impression, we are conscious that we are conveying precisely the opposite and yet are powerless to help it. This happens far more often with young people than with older ones : for with increasing years the spiritual part of us gains more power over the physical and mental parts—or at any rate ought to do if we are making proper use of our education on earth, and thereby fitting ourselves for higher and happier spheres.

Gradually Hugh and Barbara made their mutual correspondence the vehicle through which they translated into words the deep and hidden things of the soul, unhampered by any superficial variations of manner or expression : and thereby helped their own spiritual growth as well as each other’s. Each had suffered severely from their respective lack of attractiveness to the eye of flesh : each had been weighed in the balance of personal charm and had been found

wanting : and each was conscious that this judgment was not a righteous judgment, but was awarded according to superficial considerations. In one way Barbara had been as hardly hit by Harold Timpany's defection as Hugh had been by Viola's : not as far as her deeper feelings were concerned, it is true ; she had never loved Harold as Hugh had loved his wife ; but her pride had received a similar blow to his, in that she had failed to pass the ordinary test of human attractiveness. Both Hugh and Barbara were conscious that the other was—from the human point of view—a failure : and herein lay the bond of sympathy between them. Successful people are all very well in their way ; but they are more or less inclined to be hard-hearted and rough-shod in their dealings with their fellows. Failures are either self-centred and bitter to a degree ; or else they are the very salt of the earth. There is no middle-course for them, as there is for their successful brothers and sisters.

Kinfell had not intended to come home for leave at all during his time in India. He hated the idea of returning to any place which reminded him of Viola : and the Farquhars had expressed themselves so freely on the subject of his wife's behaviour and his own folly in ever taking to himself such a wife, that the relations between them and himself had become strained to the last degree. A man may be quite ready to curse his wife himself : but he never thanks anybody who comes to help him in his cursing. He prefers them to follow the example of Balaam the son of Beor, and to bless instead.

But in his growing interest in Barbara's letters, Hugh gradually began to change his plans, and to feel that England was not such an objectionable place after all. He still barred Scotland, and vowed to himself that nothing would induce him to stay with the Farquhars again. But the prospect of a few months'

leave spent at Northbridge offered considerable attractions : and the more he dwelt in thought upon these attractions, the more powerful they grew : until at last—after he had been in India for about four years—he decided to come home for a summer, and to spend that summer at Northbridge.

Great was the joy of the inmates of The 'Chevrons when this plan was revealed to them. Mrs. Windybank would not hear of Hugh's putting up at the inn in the market-place, as he suggested : her hospitable soul cried out at the indignity of such an arrangement, as all this happened in those happy, easy-going, pre-war days, when there was enough food to go round and plenty to spare, and hospitality was a delight rather than a difficulty.

Thus it came to pass that on a lovely spring day Hugh Kinfell arrived at Northbridge.

Caroline met him at the station : for even then the world—or at any rate the middle-aged inhabitants of it—set bounds beyond which the young unmarried female might not stray : and although Barbara was quite modern enough to laugh at this auntly arrangement, she was still shy enough to avail herself of it without a murmur ; for after one has outpoured one's soul upon paper before the eyes of another, one always shrinks a little from the first subsequent glance of those widely opened eyes. Therefore Barbara stayed indoors, and employed the time in running aimlessly up and down stairs and altering the ornaments upon all the chimney-pieces, in the way that women have when a long-expected visitor is due : while Mrs. Windybank filled the interval by giving numerous and conflicting orders as to the tea which was to be served immediately upon Lord Kinfell's arrival.

At last he and Caroline arrived, and were met in the hall by Mrs. Windybank, whilst Barbara hung behind in a fit of shyness of which she was thoroughly

ashamed : and before she could get her breath properly he was in the drawing-room, holding the hand which she held out to him while her grandmother duly informed him that 'this was Barbara.'

At first Hugh was staggered by her likeness to Viola—the same height, the same hair, the same eyes : and then he was struck by the difference between the two : and after the first minute the difference seemed more marked than the likeness. While Viola had been of goddess-like proportions and radiant with health and vigour, this girl was slight and fragile-looking : her hair was quite as beautiful as his wife's, but did not appear so, as it was far more plainly dressed : her eyes, however, were lovelier than Lady Kinfell's had ever been, for they were the eyes of one who had suffered, and the soul looked through them as it had never looked through Viola's. But there the likeness ended. In vain Hugh searched Barbara's face for the perfection of outline and delicacy of colouring which had distinguished Lady Kinfell : they were not to be found. There was doubtless a strong family resemblance between the two girls : but while the one had been absolutely beautiful, the other was not even pretty—merely gracious and pleasing. In voice Barbara was strikingly like Viola : but instead of Viola's quick utterance and ultra-fashionable pronunciation, she had caught the slight drawl, and a faint flavour of the accent, peculiar to the Midlands. Nevertheless as he grew to know her better—and in fact at the first moment of meeting—Barbara had for Hugh the same charm that Viola had once had : a deep fascination which was something quite apart from looks or manner or conversation : that indefinable attraction which is really independent of the eyes or the ears or the mind, but which knits human souls together in a bond which neither life nor death can break, a bond stronger than principalities or powers.

As for Barbara she felt as most girls feel when their ideal at last materialises and they meet their fairy prince face to face. For she had so long worshipped Hugh from afar, and had also corresponded with him so intimately, that she could hardly believe that this big, plain man of soldierly bearing was the hero of all her dreams and imaginations. It seemed impossible to meet so perfect a creature in the flesh. But as she grew to know him better, she found that he was by no means too perfect for everyday life : yet that withal he was still good enough never to fail or disappoint her. And that is what a woman wants : a man who is adequate to adorn a pedestal when necessary ; and competent between times to occupy her heart.

For the first day or so Hugh and Barbara experienced that shyness which we all feel when for some time we have corresponded intimately with some other person, and then suddenly find the written word exchanged for the spoken one : but after a while their mutual sympathy proved stronger than their mutual reserve, and they began to talk to each other even more easily than they had written.

If Barbara had been beautiful, Hugh would have scented danger and stiffened at once : beauty had betrayed him so cruelly that he now shied at the mere sight of it, and shrank from it as from a delusion and a snare. As he had once loved it too much, he now hated it accordingly : as a burnt child dreads the fire, so Lord Kinfeil dreaded the sight of a pretty face. But though Barbara was sufficiently pleasing to attract him, she was not good-looking enough to frighten him, or to fall under his now unalterable conviction that no beautiful woman was worthy of trust or confidence : therefore he accepted her delightful companionship as a boon from heaven ; though had she been as handsome as her mother he would have rejected it as a temptation from hell.

To Barbara, whose spirit had been disciplined by the days of disfigurement which succeeded her accident and by the consequent behaviour of the youth of Northbridge in general and of Harold Timpany in particular, Hugh's obvious approbation was intoxicating indeed. For the first time since she could remember, a man accorded to her her full mead of admiration and appreciation, without the sheltering presence of the grey veil: and a man, moreover, of infinitely better birth and breeding than any whom she could recall having met before. Therefore Hugh was as great a blessing to her as she was to him, and they each equally glorified and transfigured the world for the other.

Long and delightful walks they took together in the beautiful country surrounding the old town: and as the first inevitable shyness wore off, they continued by word of mouth the close friendship and intimate intellectual communion which they had begun by letter.

To Kinfell, whose sole experience of religious life since the death of his parents had been the harsh and stern Calvinism of the Farquhar family, the happy and simple Christianity of Mrs. Windybank and her household was a revelation indeed. To the Farquhars religion was a heavy and uncomfortable cloak reserved for Sunday wear, which dragged down the bearer of it and sorely impeded his progress: but to all at The Chevrons it was a garment of praise, which sheltered the wearer alike from 'the heat o' the sun and the stormy winter's rages.' And they talked about it so simply and in their natural voices: not lowering their tones when the Deity was mentioned, as if they were referring to some depressing relation lately deceased; but bringing the constant thought of Him into their daily walk and conversation, until the smallest detail of everyday life was elevated into

a sacrament expressing and setting forth the dealings of God with Man.

‘ Unless we realise that it is our Father’s Hand that has painted the picture, I think that half the beauty of Nature is wasted on us,’ remarked Mrs. Windybank one lovely afternoon when they were all sitting in the top garden and revelling in the exquisite view. ‘ I so often repeat to myself the promise, “Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field : and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.” When we are in tune with the Infinite, all Nature belongs to us as part of our Father’s domain : then we can take all Nature for our province indeed, as it is one of the provinces of our Heavenly Father’s Kingdom.’

‘ Of course if you look at it like that,’ said Barbara, ‘ it takes away that queer feeling of sadness which beautiful scenery is so apt to bring on.’

‘ Of course it does,’ agreed Miss Caroline, ‘ if you ’ve got the feeling in the first place : but for my part I ’ve never been able to understand why beautiful scenery should make people sad, though I ’ve often heard it said that it does. Now if hideous scenery produced sadness, I could understand it : it makes even me sad to go through the Black Country, and to see the coal-pits and the slag-heaps and the poor little children growing up amongst them : but a view like this——’ and she waved her hand towards the distant hills— ‘ I consider most cheering.’

Hugh’s brow puckered in the way it always did when he was puzzled. ‘ I think I see a bit what Barbara is driving at. I don’t pretend to understand it, but there is a queer sort of sadness which beauty—and beauty alone—is apt to induce : quite different from the natural shrinking we all feel from ugliness.’

Barbara nodded : ‘ Yes : the beautiful scenery is really much sadder than the coal-pits : I mean sadder

in the way Hugh means, though not really sadder in the practical sense : but I don't feel that Granny's prescription altogether cures it. Of course all Nature is God's province : but it is a province in revolt ; and that is why our subconscious selves feel sad when they see its beauty—much sadder naturally than when they only see the ugly side of it. One doesn't mind losing ugly things half as much as losing beautiful ones.'

'God does, my dear,' said Mrs. Windybank : 'the less valuable a thing is in man's eyes, the dearer it is to Him. He does not look on the outward appearance.'

'That may be, Granny : but we weren't saying that God felt sad at the sight of a beautiful landscape, but that we did : and we are the sort of beings who do look on the outward appearance, and value things accordingly. Therefore we are sadder at the loss of a mountain than at the loss of a slag-heap.'

'But why do you apply the term "lost" to Nature?' asked Kinfell. 'I've heard of lost souls, but never of lost scenery.'

Miss Windybank supported him. 'It couldn't be. Man is in revolt because he sinned : but trees and mountains can't sin. When you talk about provinces being in revolt you mean the inhabitants of them are : not the beasts and the stones of the field.'

'I'm not so sure,' retorted Barbara : 'I believe that in some queer way, which we can't as yet understand, the thing which we speak of as The Fall included far more than just mankind. Evidently Man was responsible for it : but, like Samson, he included much more than himself in the overthrow. Surely when we hear of the whole creation groaning and travailing together, it means more than just ourselves : it includes the mountains and the streams and the trees of the field, as well as all the animals.'

Caroline looked obstinate. 'That's all very well : but I can't for the life of me see how mountains and trees can do what is wrong, even, if animals may. What sort of wrong things could mountains do, even if they wanted to ? And how could they want, being inanimate creatures ? I can understand that a dog, for instance, can steal or be disobedient : but a mountain can't run off with a bone, or refuse to come when you whistle to it. At least it always would refuse, because it couldn't help itself. I really can't do with all these modern, new-fangled ideas : they're beyond me.'

Barbara laughed again. 'I don't exactly accuse the mountains and the trees or even the animals of being selfish and disobedient and bad-tempered as we are : but all the same I do believe they were included in the general upset of Man's Fall, and are likewise included in his Redemption.'

Miss Windybank snorted. 'New-fangled rubbish, I call it !'

'No, Auntie, it is quite what learned people call a tenable position. I believe that the great forces of Nature are, like ourselves, on debatable ground ; sometimes on God's side and sometimes on the devil's. Of course eventually they will all be brought back into line ; they are among the principalities and powers that shall finally be made subject : but at present they belong to the province in revolt.'

'Oh, my love,' exclaimed Mrs. Windybank, 'I do not care for that idea at all ! I have always regarded Nature as a manifestation of the glory of God.'

'And so it is sometimes,' replied Barbara : 'just as human nature is : and sometimes they are both quite the reverse. I think that when Nature is beautiful and beneficent, she is showing forth the glory of God : but when she is hard and merciless and

cruel—with terrible storms and earthquakes and things of that kind—she has fallen from grace, and is acting as an agent of evil : exactly as Man sometimes acts as a living *epistle from God, and sometimes as a messenger of the devil. My idea is that Man and Nature are in the same boat.'

' I think I see what you mean,' said Hugh in his slow, thoughtful way : ' and to my mind it is a theory which explains a good many things. Sometimes one feels that mountains and the sea and great overpowering things like these are a sort of message, don't you know, to tell us how wonderful God is Who made them : and at the other times—especially in tropical countries—one feels that the God behind the machine is a sort of cruel Juggernaut.'

Barbara nodded. ' I know. When Nature does the "red in tooth and claw" touch, one cannot believe that Almighty Love is at the back of her, setting her on : any more than we can believe that horrible savages are doing that which is lawful and right, when they eat each other up. If the devils could enter into the swine, I see no reason why they shouldn't enter into the winds and the waves : in fact they did enter into them once when Christ was in the boat, and tried to drown Him. Of course they were subject to Him when He chose to take up His power and reign over them, as He did in these two instances : just as the wickedest people are subject to Him really : but when men choose to serve the devil they are often allowed to serve the devil ; and I think the great forces of Nature—the thrones and dominions and principalities and powers—are allowed to do the same. Of course finally they will all be put under His Feet : but in the meantime I don't believe that we have the monopoly of free-will.'

' I like your idea,' said Kinfell : ' it is new to me, and I should never have thought of it for myself : but

now that you have suggested it, it seems somehow to satisfy me.'

It was in conversations such as this that Hugh recognised Barbara's charm. She had the light conversational touch which had fascinated him so much in Viola : but whilst Viola's matter was as frivolous as her manner, there were deeper thoughts concealed under Barbara's apparently aimless prattle. They were both light in hand : but the lightness in Barbara was merely superficial ; perhaps for the good reason that Barbara had suffered and Viola had not. Even while worshipping Viola for her beauty, Hugh had felt his soul to be starving in her company : but below Barbara's airy banter there lay something which supplied his spirit's utmost need.

'I say, Barbara, I'm not going to call you Barbara any longer,' Hugh remarked one day when they were gardening together in the old hanging garden behind The Chevrons.

'I don't see any particular reason why you should,' replied the girl, looking up into his face from the kneeling position which she had adopted in order to plant some new rock-plants in the interstices of one of the narrow staircases : 'except that it happens to be my name.'

Hugh knelt down beside her, and began excavating fresh opportunities for some blue lithospermums : 'I know that : but it isn't at all a suitable name for you. It's too large and bombastic somehow.'

'Well, I'm not exactly a dwarf myself : 'I'm five feet eight.'

'But you never give the idea of bigness, you are so slim.'

Barbara nodded complacently, as she tucked a golden alyssum into its little bed : 'Yes, I'm glad of that, Hugh : I couldn't bear to be fat. I have kept my figure if I haven't kept my face : I will say that

for myself. I got much thinner during my long illness, so my nurse told me : and I am thankful to say I have never again fallen from grace. Not that I was ever fat, judging by my photographs : but I wasn't so thin when I was in New Zealand as I am now. But do you think that Barbara is a stout name ?' .

' I do, rather.'

Barbara sat back on her heels, looking thoughtful : ' Of course some names are fat and some thin, just as some names are fair and some are dark. There 's no doubt about that. For instance Margaret is thin and so is Gertrude ; whilst Joan and Madeline are quite plump. Maria is awfully thin : but Elizabeth is really quite fat, and so is Harriet. Emma and Susan are on the stout side, too : but Annie and Agnes are very thin indeed.'

' Well, then,' said Hugh, waving about a small trowel to accentuate his words : ' as Barbara is too fine and large for you altogether, I 've decided to call you Babs. It 's a nice jolly sort of name : and when two people are special pals, as you and I are, I think it 's rather nice for them to have special names for each other that nobody else uses, don't you know ? Catch my point ?'

Barbara flushed with pleasure. ' Oh, Hugh, how sweet of you to feel like that ! Of course I shall love to have a patent name just for you to use and no one else : and I think it is just ripping of you to have thought of it. And what shall I call you ?'

' Call me Hugo,' replied Kinfell : ' it is what my mother used to call me when I was a little chap, and no one has called me Hugo since she died.'

They were both silent for a minute, with that strange expectant stillness which comes just before the dawn, or before some great procession : then Hugh said : ' I say, I want you to come with me to see Merrivale

Hall this afternoon : I hear it is a place described in *John Inglesant*, and I think it wouldn't be bad fun for you and me to go and explore it together.'

Barbara's face fell : ' Oh, Hugo, I'm sô sorry : but I've promised to go and see old Mrs. Pipstone this afternoon.'

' Well you can go and see her to-morrow instead. Put her by for a rainy day, when we can't do anything else.'

' But I can't put her by : she is bedridden and she'd be so disappointed if I didn't go the day I promised.'

Hugh's face showed his disappointment : ' What a confounded nuisance ! '

' Never mind, Hugo : it will count as feet-washing, you know.'

Kinfell looked puzzled. ' Count as feet-washing ' What on earth do you mean ? '

' Don't you remember in the Middle Ages people who wanted to be very good used to wash the feet of pilgrims, and it was counted to them for righteousness ? Well, we don't do that exactly nowadays, but the principle is the same. We do heaps of things that count as feet-washing : and whenever I feel I ought to do something that I don't want to do, I just remember that it will be put to my credit in the feet-washing account, so I do it cheerfully.'

' I see. It's very nice of you, Babs, dear, and just like you ! ' And then Hugh suddenly remembered Viola, and wondered if she had ever done anything that could ' count as feet-washing ' during the years that he had known her : and for the life of his soul he could not recall a single thing !

Sometimes Hugh was so struck by the likeness between Viola and Barbara that for a moment he almost believed that his long-lost wife was once more standing by his side : and at other times—as on the present occasion—this unlikeness to each other showed them

leagues and leagues apart : and then he thought, with an inward groan, if only Viola had been as much like Barbara spiritually as she was physically, what a happy man he would have been ! For by this time he had learned the lesson that it is only the inside of the cup and platter that is of real consequence.

CHAPTER VIII

LIONS IN THE PATH

THE ladies had retired to rest, and Kinfell sat in the library smoking his final pipe—that pipe, ‘at the close of day, possibly sweetest,’ of which the poet sings. Kinfell’s pipe was not as sweet as usual : nevertheless that final pipe was refilled several times, for Hugh was in a fix : day by day it had become more and more evident to him that the position in which he found himself was intolerable, and that some solution must be discovered. In short, Hugh could not conceal from himself any longer that he was in love—and it was more than doubtful whether he had any right to be in love. Wherefore it behoved him to take stock of the situation : and this he proceeded to do with the aid of his faithful pipe. Alas ! he found less solace than usual in his hitherto infallible comforter.

Kinfell was a self-contained man, not prone to wear his heart upon his sleeve, or to seek advice from others. He was a solitary man, as he had been a solitary child : during his early life he had made no close friend whom he could grapple to his soul with hoops of steel, and in whom he could confide. The one exception was Barbara. With her indeed he had formed a close friendship ; first in the letters they had exchanged ; then, on his return from India, the friendship, begun by correspondence, had deepened ; and had finally developed, on his part at any rate, into a consuming passion. But he could not confide in Barbara, without acknowledging the love he felt for her—a love

which it was not at all certain he was justified in revealing. To tell a woman that you dare not make love to her, nine times out of ten *is* to make love to her: and, for anything he knew to the contrary, Hugh was still a married man.

And there was even a greater difficulty. He was no coxcomb: no man had less vanity or was more diffident of his own attractiveness. Yet he could not conceal from himself the fact that it was highly probable that Barbara was falling in love with him, or at least in great danger of so doing.

But between Hugh and his love there stood, like an angel with a flaming sword at the gate of Paradise, the figure of Viola. Was she really dead? Was it possible that she could have hidden herself for so many years—that she could have disappeared and left no trace of her whereabouts? Hugh's common-sense told him that this was impossible. Yet there was always the chance that she might possibly be alive: there was no legal proof of her death.

How had he managed to get himself into this awkward predicament? That was the question that Hugh set himself to find out: and in order to do this, he tried to review his past life. This was no easy task to one so little accustomed to self-examination and self-analysis as Kinfell. Still it had to be done. Wherefore, with true British grit, he set himself in his slow and deliberate way to the unaccustomed and uncongenial task.

When a young man it was beauty, and beauty alone, in a woman that attracted him. He had the delight of the Greeks of old in physical perfection: and perhaps the fact that he himself, with all his clean-limbed and athletic body, lacked comeliness of countenance, caused him to attach undue importance to a pretty face. So it happened that when Viola swam into his ken, with her lovely features and brilliant eyes and

exquisite complexion, he fell an easy victim to her numerous perfections. Here was his ideal, the embodiment in human form of all his dreams: surely she was a goddess descended from Olympus—a goddess whom Hugh worshipped with all the ardour of first love. Hugh was not a literary person and it is probable that he had never read a line of Marlowe; but he would have asked with the poet, ‘Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?’

In spite of his love he had scarcely dared hope that so fair a woman would condescend to accept his adoration, or at any rate to reward it by marrying him. It never occurred to him that his rank and wealth would make any difference: he would have scorned the idea that with them he could have purchased Viola’s hand, as an insult both to himself and to her. When she accepted him, he was filled with wonder at his good fortune. It is true that Viola had said she did not love him: but he did not believe her. To his straightforward and simple soul it was incredible that a thoroughly nice girl—and such he firmly believed Viola to be—would accept a man whom she did not love. When she said she did not love him, he was convinced that she did not mean what she said. It was, indeed, wonderful to him that so perfect a creature should love so unattractive a man as he conceived himself to be: but the fact that she accepted him proved to him that, whatever she might say, her love was really his.

In the wonder and the bliss of the first few weeks of married life, Hugh’s happiness had been complete. The importance of being married, of being a peeress, the delightful trip to Paris, the unaccustomed luxury after the straitened circumstances of her father’s house, all these had combined to make Viola for the time being a pleasant and delightful companion.

Then had come the reaction. In looking back he

saw that he had soon discovered that he and his beautiful wife had little or nothing in common. His silence exasperated her : her disregard of all those conventions in which he had been brought up, and of the beliefs which were a part of his very being, at first perplexed and finally estranged him. He had struggled hard to preserve a belief in Viola's love : he had argued with himself that it was his fault—he was a silent fellow not quick at the uptake, and naturally a brilliant, high-spirited woman found him a dull companion. But though there had been a certain amount of truth in his arguments against himself, they had proved of no use. One by one his wife had trampled upon his cherished idols : and in so doing had undermined his love and devotion. Slowly and sorrowfully he had come to the conclusion that Viola did not care a jot for him : that his marriage was a ghastly failure.

Then had come the crash. It had never occurred to Kinfell in his gloomiest forebodings that his married life could be broken up. His marriage was a failure, true : but that only meant that he and Viola must make the best of a bad job ; that he must give way to her as far as possible, allow her to have as much liberty as a wife could reasonably hope for, make her as happy as she could be, letting his own happiness and peace of mind go by the board. So it happened that when Viola, in her recklessness, left her husband's house and disappeared from human ken, Hugh's faith received a severe shock. The world as he knew it was shattered. When his search for his lost wife proved unavailing, and he had to reconcile himself to the fact that she had gone and gone for ever, he found that he must reconstruct his life and his beliefs on a new basis. In such circumstances many a man would have thrown his belief in human nature to the winds, and would have sought

distraction in a life of dissipation and pleasure. Not so Kinfell. He may have felt the temptation to do so, but if so the evil spirit was wrestled with and cast out. It was well for him that in this time of trial and stress that he made the acquaintance of so true a woman as Mrs. Windybank, whose womanly sympathy and gentle influence powerfully affected him.

But in the wreck of his ideals, one thing was clear to Kinfell. The staff called Beauty had broken in his hands and had wounded him. Never again would he be bewitched by that lure. He had loved a woman for her beauty : he had lavished upon her the unselfish devotion of a true heart : and she had left him, had thrown aside his love as a thing of nothing worth. Henceforth Woman should have no place in his life. Her beauty was but a snare to catch the unwary fool. So thought Hugh when he went with his battery to India.

Of any love, save the love for beauty and perfection of form, Hugh at this time had no idea. He knew, of course, that marriage was for the mutual society, help, and comfort of husband and wife : he had vowed to love, comfort, honour and keep his wife in sickness and in health, and had fully intended to keep that vow ; and had kept it till she ran away from him. A man may still love an absentee wife—but it is a difficult matter to honour her, and still more difficult to comfort or to keep her, especially if she does not ask for an allowance. But of a marriage of true minds, of the sympathy with each other's thoughts and ideals, of the understanding of each other's points of view, of all this he knew—during his short married life and for long afterwards—nothing.

Then there came another and a potent influence into his existence. It must not be supposed that he fumed and fretted or shunned society during his life

in India. He took his part in the usual routine of a soldier's life abroad : he hunted, played polo and cricket, went to dances and picnics, as other officers did : yet, for all that, his real life was solitary, and all the flavour had gone out of it. The only thing in which he felt any real interest was soldiering : that at any rate he took in earnest ; and as a consequence he became an admirable officer, and was adored by his men.

But apart from his duties as a soldier, he was a disappointed man ; and, like other disappointed men, he brooded over his misfortunes. Happily for him the sweetness of his nature prevented him from becoming a cynic : on the other hand it made him more unhappy than he would otherwise have been.

Such was Hugh when Barbara came into his life. In her letters, for the first time since Viola's flight, he found solace and comfort. He began to take more interest in this unknown correspondent : he found himself able to unbosom himself to her, to confide his troubles to her, to ask her advice. He became interested in all she had to say about herself, in all the trivial details which filled her letters. So it came to pass that when he met her face to face, they were no strangers to each other.

Living in the same house, walking together day by day, their friendship ripened rapidly—and, before Hugh was aware of it, friendship (on his side at any rate) had developed into love.

The discovery was bound to come sooner or later : and Hugh at last realised what any woman would have told him weeks before, that he was in love, and deeply in love—not this time with the beauty of a woman, but with the woman herself. If Hugh had not been haunted by the memory of Viola's dazzling loveliness, he might well have fallen in love with Barbara's face ; for, if it had not the perfection of

Viola's, it had a charm of its own. If Hugh could truthfully say, 'She is not fair to outward view, as many maidens be,' he could also certainly complete the stanza—'her loveliness I never knew, until she smiled on me.' And the loveliness was the loveliness of perfect sympathy, and complete comradeship. The staff of Beauty had indeed snapped in his hands: but there remained the staff of Bands. Would that also prove a broken reed, on which, if a man leaned, it would go into his hand and pierce him? Alas for Hugh! It seemed as if he were not to have the chance of testing this momentous question. For how could he offer his hand to Barbara so long as he had no proof of Viola's death?

The question was a hard one, the problem insoluble, the dilemma absolute.

In the early stages of his love Hugh had compromised with himself. He delighted in the sweet companionship of Barbara, and he argued in his own mind that, after all, it was only his own happiness that was at stake. If he chose to play with fire and burn his fingers, he was man enough to submit to the penalty. He would have had his hour's enjoyment; and then, when the time came for his return to India, what mattered it if he went back more miserable than he came? It was better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Barbara should never know; and he would live on the memory of these happy days.

But an end came to these fine imaginings when one day Barbara innocently showed Hugh that she also cared. The revelation was sudden and took Hugh aback. In his humility it was a development he had never anticipated, a complication that he had never foreseen. But it had to be faced: and Hugh was not one to shirk an awkward situation.

Was Viola really dead? It seemed a horrible thing

to Hugh to desire the death of the wife whom he had once so madly worshipped. But it was not her death that he desired ; • it was a proof of her death, of the fact of which he was by this time firmly convinced in his own mind. Was there no way out of the dilemma ?

If Kinfell had had only himself to consider, he would have taken the risk and have married Barbara, considering that he was morally justified in so doing. But what if, after all, it proved that he was wrong in imagining that Viola was dead ? Supposing he did marry Barbara, and that then Viola reappeared ? It was possible that she had successfully concealed her whereabouts from him, and was content to be regarded as dead so long as he made no attempt to marry again. But if she heard of his marriage it might very well be that her jealousy would be aroused, and that she would claim her rights. In that case, what would Barbara's position be ? He might himself risk a prosecution for bigamy ; but could he expose Barbara to the ordeal of being a wife who was no wife ? More than that, should Barbara have a son and should Viola prove to be alive, that son would no longer be the heir to the title and estates, but would be a nameless outcast. He might say that he and Barbara were husband and wife in the eyes of heaven—but their son would never be Lord Kinfell in the eyes of the world.

As Hugh pondered and pondered, sitting by himself in Mrs. Windybank's library trying hard to find a way out of his difficulties, no wonder that his pipe lost its savour, and proved but a miserable comforter !

It must be counted to his credit that his own happiness weighed little with him : it was of Barbara that he thought. How happy they would be together, what a perfect marriage—a marriage of true minds—theirs would be ! Alas that the shadow of Viola intruded

itself between them ! Her selfishness and want of sympathy had ruined her husband's life, while she was alive : and now that she was, as he believed, dead, she still was able to exercise her baleful influence.

At last, with a deep sigh, Hugh got up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. His mind was made up. Things could not go on as they had been going : it was not fair to Barbara. He would make a clean breast of it and tell her all that was in his mind : and then leave her to decide whether she would take the risk of marrying him. Now that he knew she cared, too, he could not go on loving her in silence ; neither could he take the matter into his own hands, and go away without saying anything, leaving her to put what construction she chose upon his fickleness. A Victorian lover would have taken this latter course, and counted it to himself for righteousness : but Hugh was modern enough to realise that a woman has as much right as a man to a voice in the shaping of their mutual destiny. The chivalry which commended a man for spoiling his own life—and incidentally the life of the woman he loved—if he considered, rightly or wrongly, that it was for her good, was by Kinfell's time a creed outworn : the twentieth century has learned that it is within a woman's rights to have at any rate a share in the shattering of her own career. It was a tenet of the Victorians that a man had no right to tell a woman that he loved her until he was in a position to marry her ; and that a woman had no right to love a man until he had asked her to be his wife. So they preached and so they believed.

There is no doubt that the Victorian period had much to recommend it : it was sensible and comfortable and above all things secure : but it was the period of what we have since learned to call by the name of 'camouflage.'

However Hugh and Barbara did not rightly belong

to that period : they had been born in it, it is true : but in its latter days when it had become careless and indulgent and irresponsible, and treated its children rather as its grandchildren, for whom it had no responsibility save only to give them a good time.

So the very next afternoon, when the two were sitting on the banks of the Severn, Hugh told Barbara exactly how it was with him.

‘As long as I didn’t think you cared,’ he said in conclusion, ‘I felt the whole thing was my show, and that it was up to me to have a run for my money, and to be happy with you till the end of my leave ; and then to pay for it in extra misery after I went back to India. But now that I know you care too, I can’t leave it at that.’

‘When did you find out that I cared ?’ asked Barbara with true feminine curiosity.

‘Yesterday at lunch : the way you looked at me when I got up and handed you the potatoes.’

‘I see. But my look had nothing to do with the potatoes. It was because you did it so clumsily and I wanted to help you. Men are awfully clumsy and helpless, you know, left to themselves. They want us to give them a hand all the time.’

‘They do, Babs ; the whole time : but the trouble is that I ought not to ask you to give me your dear hand, though I want it more than anything else in the world.’

‘And I want yours more than anything else—except your heart.’

‘You’ve got that right enough : it is yours to all eternity. I suppose I ought not to have given you even that,’ said Hugh ruefully, ‘till I knew that I was free : but it was yours before I guessed what was going on.’

‘Then I don’t think I mind so much about the hand if you are sure the heart is all mine.’

'Every bit of it : nothing can alter that now. But it isn't altogether plain sailing, you know, when the heart is in one place and the hand is in another. It is bound to lead to unhappiness sooner or later.'

'But the heart is the thing that really matters,' said Barbara—like a woman.

'Not altogether,' replied Hugh—like a man.

'Take care of the heart and the hand will take care of itself,' added Barbara.

'But it won't, if the heart gets too strong for it : and then there 's trouble. I assure you it is much the best for the two to be knocked down in the same lot.' It was noteworthy that while Viola's nonsense used to stupefy Hugh and make him dull and silent, Barbara's had precisely the opposite effect. But that was probably because she loved him, and Viola did not.

'I am going up to town to morrow,' continued KinfeU, 'to see the detective who conducted the search for Viola when she first disappeared, and ask him if he can't do something further to clear the matter up. But supposing he can't, I want you to tell me straight out—as man to man—if you think I am justified in asking you to marry me, as long as things are as they are ?'

Barbara was silent for a long time. She sat quite still in the short grass and looked at the slowly flowing river—not at her lover. At last she said, trying unsuccessfully to hide the trembling in her voice : 'Honest Injun, Hugo, I don't think you are. It 's dear of you to want to do it ; and your wanting to do it makes me happier and prouder than I 've ever been in my life before ; but, all the same, I don't see how it can be done.'

Hugh was both disappointed and exultant : disappointed that he must forgo his heart's desire, and exultant because Barbara had acted up to his high

ideal of her, and shown herself worthy of his soul's adoration.

'Then I won't ask you to marry me if you don't want me to: I'll do whatever you tell me, my darling,' he said: then he added boyishly, 'But you'll kiss me once—just once—won't you, Babs dear?'

Barbara lifted her face to his. 'Yes, I will, Hugo, though I really don't think I ought, without knowing that you are a complete widower.'

And he took her in his arms and held her fast.

Kinfell went up to London the next day, and interviewed the detective who had taken charge of the case when Viola first vanished. But there was little comfort to be found there. The detective merely told Hugh (what he knew quite well without being told) that if they could not find Lady Kinfell when she first disappeared, there was no hope whatsoever of doing so after all these years had elapsed covering her trail still more completely. They put the old advertisements in the newspapers again and again with no result: the mystery of Viola's disappearance remained as impenetrable as ever.

CHAPTER IX

ARMAGEDDON

THINGS were in this hopeless condition—Hugh and Barbara loving each other passionately, and yet unable to become more to each other because of Viola's shadow always falling between them—when the incredible happened and the world was suddenly turned upside down.

Germany cried 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war: and these hell-hounds straightway fastened their fangs into poor helpless Belgium.

England—unlike the inhabitants of Meroz—came to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

And Armageddon began.

This is neither the place nor the hour to tell the story which is written in blood as both a warning and an example for those that come after—the story of the Great War. It only enters into this history in so far as it affected the history of Hugh and Barbara.

'This means that my holiday is at an end,' said he, as soon as they had heard that fateful message of the fourth of August.

'Oh! Hugo, you won't have to go,' exclaimed Barbara with a little gasping cry.

'But I jolly well shall! And at once, too.'

'But you can't fight all by yourself,' suggested the practical Miss Caroline: 'and all your men and guns and things are in India.'

'My dear,' replied her mother, 'Hugh is the best

judge of that, and I am sure Hugh will do what is right.'

The family party were sitting at the breakfast table at The Chevrons : they had just read the fatal news in the morning's paper.

'Of course I'd rather be with my own battery,' said Kirfell : 'and I expect that will be ordered home pretty quick : but in the meantime I must put myself in the hands of the War Office and go wherever I am sent. And I'm jolly glad that I am on leave, and so ready to do something at once. If I'd been in India the blighters might have kept me out there for a bit, and I couldn't have stood that. I want to get to grips with the Germans as fast as I can.'

'You'd better finish your breakfast first,' said Miss Windybank : 'you may be able to fight without men or guns, but not without food. If you've got to march to victory on an empty stomach, let it be a German stomach, I beg.'

After her first involuntary cry Barbara said never a word : what was the good ?—as a soldier Hugh was bound to fight for his country, whether it broke Barbara's heart or whether it didn't. As a matter of fact, her heart did not come into the question ; greater issues were at stake. All that was left for her to do was either to submit willingly to the inevitable, or to kick against the pricks. In Barbara's heart had already begun the battle which has been fought in the hearts of thousands of other women since the War began—the battle between patriotism and love : and in her case, as in the case of thousands of other women, patriotism won. But not without a sore contest.

'Besides, I *want* to go,' said Hugh, when they were alone together : 'there isn't a man in Great Britain who won't want to be in this churn-up as soon as possible, to give Germany the biggest beating she has ever had

in her life. But apart from that, I think it won't be a bad thing for us to separate for a little, Babs. You see, as long as I think it possible that Viola may be alive—or, rather till I know as a fact that she is dead—I oughtn't to make love to you : and I've got to that pitch that to be with you and not to make love to you is simply torture.'

'That is how it is with me, Hugo dear. I keep saying to myself that you are really a cousin—a sort of imitation brother affair—but it is no good, I don't feel in the least sisterly or cousinly ; and it is an awful effort trying to keep up to the sister and cousin pitch.'

'I know, Babs : and that is what makes it so deuced hard for me. If I thought you really were on the sisterly tack, I believe I could do my part all right : but I can't, now that I know you care as much as I do. To be candid with you, I'm about fed up with this cousinly sort of arrangement and I can't stick it much longer. It seems to me we've got to the point we must be all or nothing to each other. So the War comes in quite opportunely as far as I am concerned.'

Barbara nodded. 'Yes, Hugo, you are quite right. I feel we can't go on like this. It is too much of a strain. But it is a comfort to know that we love each other, and that therefore nothing can really part us—not part our souls, I mean.'

'And look here, Babs darling,' added Hugh in that boyish way which she always found so attractive : 'if I do get knocked out in the fighting, you'll know that wherever I am I shall go on loving you till you come over and join me : because Viola can't come between us after we are dead, you know. We've got that comfort—that marriage only holds good till death. After that we shall belong to each other for ever and ever.'

And with that Barbara had to be—and in a way was—content.

It did not take long for Hugh to go up to town and report himself at Headquarters : and he was ordered out with the Expeditionary Force at once. Before he went, he ran down for a few hours to Northbridge just to say good-bye : and Barbara bade him God-speed with that cheerful courage whereby so many women have proved themselves fit mates for their dear ones at the front—helpmeets for those splendid soldiers who have counted not their lives dear in the cause of Freedom and Righteousness.

Just before he went Kinfell said to her, ‘There is one thing I feel I must say to you, Babs, in case I don’t come back again. I have been awfully tempted to ask you to marry me before I go, and take the risk of Viola’s being alive or not. But it wouldn’t be fair to you, really. You have made me see that.’

‘No, Hugo dear, I haven’t refused to marry you because I feel it would put me in a doubtful position if Viola turned up afterwards : I haven’t thought of my own position at all. If that was all, I’d throw away a hundred good positions and run the risk of a thousand doubtful ones for the bliss of being your wife even for a week. But it would be *wrong* for us to marry until we know for a fact that Viola is dead : and it is the wrongness that I can’t get over.’

‘I know it is, Babs : and I love you all the more for refusing and feeling like that, though I have found it deuced hard on me sometimes. But somehow this War has altered one’s ideas about things : and if I never come back, I’d like to feel that we’d kept our love pure and clean, and that it was still the best thing we had ever known.’

Barbara nodded. ‘And we want it to remain the sort of love that is fit “to be continued in our next,” don’t we ?’

'Of course we do,' replied Hugh, 'and after all, we couldn't really belong to each other more than we do, even if we went through a hundred marriage-services.'

'Perhaps not so much. You and Viola went through a marriage-service, and yet you never belonged to each other as you and I do.'

'Never, never!' replied Kinfell. 'Even though she was my wife, I always felt that she and I were miles apart; but I lay my very soul bare before you, and I know you will always understand, and never misjudge me.'

And Barbara did understand him better than he understood himself. She knew that deep down in his heart—below his passionate adoration of and longing for her—there rested the profound and unalterable conviction that no happiness was worth the price of wrongdoing: and that to marry her, without full and sufficient proof of his first wife's death, would not only be a cruel wrong to Barbara herself but also to any children who might be born to them. So she let Hugh go out to the War, leaving the shadowy form of Viola still standing between them.

Barbara bore his going far better than she had beforehand thought it possible. She learned the lesson which most of us are forced to learn sooner or later, that things generally turn out worse than we expect, but that we bear them better. Moreover, she was upheld by that strange sense of exaltation and detachment which has animated many women since the year 1914; a subconscious feeling that all life's values are altered and that nothing really matters any more. It is not the feeling which makes for happiness or comfort or for any of the small joys of life: yet there is a sense of high adventure about it which draws the sting from ordinary trivial troubles and from common carking cares. Probably the reason for this adventurous detachment is the fact that since 1914 we have gone

down to the bedrock of things, and now deal only with fundamentals and essentials : but it would be foolish to pretend that bedrock is a comfortable or luxurious resting-place—especially for those who have been born in easier and less strenuous times. Barbara was young enough to feel that the spirit of adventure amply compensated for what she would have dubbed the ‘stodginess’ of the piping times of peace : but her grandmother and aunt—who had been respectively cradled in the solid comfort of the earlier half and the cheerful lightheartedness of the latter half of the nineteenth century—found the new order of things harder to bear. They bore it—as did their contemporaries—nobly and bravely : but it hit them harder than it hit the young, and left them more stranded and forlorn ; with the additional sorrow that there was so much to be done, and that they were too old to do it.

‘Alas ! my love,’ Mrs. Windybank confided to Barbara, ‘I am too old to *do* much ; but I am still young enough to *do without* a good deal.’

And herein she spoke for her generation, who perhaps displayed as much heroism in doing without as the younger ones displayed in doing : for the which, honour to whom honour is due.

So Hugh went out to France ; and Barbara passed through the furnace of suspense and anxiety which ere long became a beaten track to the women of Great Britain and her Dependencies. As time went on the anxiety increased, and the furnace of suffering was heated seven times hotter : and surely none could have passed through it at all, had there not walked One with them through the midst of the fire, Whose Form was like the Son of God.

Kinfell was in the retreat from Mons and later in the victory of the Marne : and passed through it all without a scratch. Meantime the patient waiting women at The Chevrons filled up their time—and as

far as possible their thoughts—with hard work. Barbara and her aunt joined the staff of a private hospital into which the owner of a large country-house near Northbridge had transformed his beautiful home; and there Barbara nursed and Caroline cooked all day long, returning home only to sleep; and taking a few days off now and again when their health required it: while Mrs. Windybank never ceased from knitting and sewing and working with her hands for the brave soldiers at the front.

For a time Barbara forgot her animosity against Viola, and felt that if only Hugh's life were spared, she would not mind whether it was spared for her or for her cousin: she would be content never to see him again, if only she could know that he was alive and well: which proved that—according to the famous judgment of Solomon—her love was of the right quality.

Then there came darker days when Kinfell was reported seriously wounded; and poor Barbara on her knees strove to strike a bargain with her Maker to the effect that if only Hugh's life were spared she would give him up entirely to the shadowy claims of Viola, and not love him any more.

Her prayer was answered, and Hugh came slowly back to life: but Barbara's joy in his recovery was marred by the news that he had left one arm behind him in the jaws of death. To Kinfell himself all the gladness was taken out of his recovery by the fact that he could never be of use as a fighting man any more: but Barbara bore this part of the affair with more than fortitude. Her heart sang for joy at the thought that whatever fighting the future held in store Hugh could no longer take a share in it: which was very unpatriotic on her part, albeit excessively womanly.

But though Barbara's prayer was answered, her bargain was not accepted; since her joy rendered it

impossible for her to fulfil her part of it. She might vow on her knees not to love Hugh any more : but as long as she was what she was, she could no more help loving him than she could help breathing. And the fact that he was sick and wounded made her love him ten times the more.

‘My dear,’ her grandmother said to her one wintry night towards the end of 1915, when Barbara came back from her work at the V.A.D. hospital, tired out : ‘I have got some news for you.’

‘Have you, Granny : what is it ?’ replied the younger woman, almost too weary to care. Miss Windybank now only cooked at the hospital three days a week, but Barbara’s nursing took up every day, the hospital was so full. She was beginning to feel that she must have a holiday soon ; and the Commandant had told her that very day how worn-out she was looking, and had urged her to go away for a few weeks. But Barbara did not want a holiday : she was afraid of having time to think, as when she was fully occupied her heart-hunger for Hugh did not hurt quite so much. She liked to work so hard that when she got to bed dog-tired she fell asleep at once, and did not lie awake fretting against the fate which separated her from the man whom she adored. She felt she would not have minded so much if only Viola had loved Hugh : even if she were dead her love would have been a claim upon him : but to give him up—when every fibre of her being was craving for him—to the shadow of a woman who was probably dead, and who had never loved him even when she was alive, sometimes seemed to Barbara a sacrifice beyond her powers—a renunciation that was as unnecessary as it was cruel. What claims had Viola upon him, even if she were alive ? She had never considered him, so why should he now consider her ? Then Barbara would remind herself that it was not only Viola whom she and Hugh were

considering—it was the children who might be born to them with a stigma upon their names ; a stigma which in Kinfell's position it would be impossible to hide or to ignore. And when she recalled that, she realised that she and Hugh could never marry until they knew for a fact that Viola was dead. And now it did not seem probable that they would ever know this. Then the circle of reasoning began again in Barbara's mind, and she went over the old ground again and again until her whole heart was sick and her whole heart faint with the unanswerable misery of it all.

'You look tired, my dear, but my news will soon cheer you up,' continued Mrs. Windybank, as Barbara threw off her unbecoming V.A.D. hat and sank into a chair : 'your aunt and I have saved it up as a nice surprise for you and told you nothing about it until it was all settled.'

'Well, what is it, Gran ?' asked Barbara, trying hard to keep any sign of irritation out of her voice.

Mrs. Windybank beamed with the happiness of one who fondly believes she is about to give happiness to another. 'Well, my love, we have heard from dear Hugh that he is leaving the military hospital this week, and wants to go somewhere to recruit and be taken care of. So your aunt and I have invited him here, and he has accepted with alacrity.'

Barbara almost cried out : but Mrs. Windybank was so intent upon her joy-giving mission that she failed to notice her granddaughter's consternation.

'Your aunt and I,' she continued cheerfully, 'have noticed for some little time that the work at the hospital is getting too hard for you, and that you require a rest : at the same time we quite understand that you would not be content in the present state of affairs to sit at home doing nothing : so we think that it will meet the case if you stay at home and just look

after poor Hugh. You see, my love, you will still be working for your country and nursing a wounded soldier, and yet will not be so hard-worked as you are at present, and so will have time to get up your strength again.'

Then at last Barbara found words : ' Did you say that Hugh was willing to come here and be nursed by me ? '

' Of course, my love,' replied Mrs. Windybank in mild surprise : ' why shouldn't he be ? I should think it was just the thing that he would like : for, strange as it may appear, he always seems quite at home and happy with your aunt and me ; and I know he is very much attached to you, dear Barbara.'

Thus confronted with the fundamental virginity of the Victorian matron, Barbara had nothing to say. She realised that it would be hopeless to try to convey to her grandmother the quality and strength of the passion which consumed her : she might shock and upset Mrs. Windybank in the attempt, but she would leave her none the wiser. To Mrs. Windybank, as to most of her generation, love was the apotheosis of schoolgirlish hero-worship ; a blind adoration for a superior being, whom it was a delight to serve and a duty to obey. True, Dr. Windybank had tried this hero-worship to the uttermost in the days of his flesh : but even then—and still more since his decease—he figured in his wife's eyes as a glorious demigod, who was none the less a son of the morning for having fallen now and again from his high estate.

The men of her own generation, and the women of succeeding ones, have laughed at the Victorian maiden who was prepared ' to be a sister ' to her old lover : but to the Victorian maiden herself there was nothing at all funny in this ; she literally meant what she said : and to her the sisterly attitude was both feasible and suitable, even though she had been in love (as she

knew love) with the brother of her adoption. The sisterly feeling was such a natural sequence to the schoolgirlish hero-worship: in fact the difference between the two states was a difference in degree rather than in kind. To the modern woman, with her mental breadth of view and her physical vitality, this attitude of her dead and gone grandmothers is as incomprehensible as it has always been to a man of any generation: but to Mrs. Windybank and her kind it was the natural—the only—standpoint. Had Dr. Windybank never taken her to wife, she would have asked nothing better of fate than to be allowed to help his sisters in looking after his health and his household, and cheering his declining years: therefore she could not be expected to understand why Barbara—even if she could not marry Hugh—would not enjoy the nursing of him. Half a loaf was such ample fare to Mrs. Windybank, that she could not imagine any one's preferring no bread at all. In which perhaps she was happier than the women of the generations succeeding her: since there are always twice as many half loaves as whole ones to go round.

But though Barbara understood her grandmother's attitude, she could not at first understand Hugh's. She wondered how he could bear to go over the old ground again, and be once more so near to her and yet so far away. She did not allow for the fact that he was weak and ill, and so could not struggle against the dictates of his own heart any longer: neither did she grasp that to those heroes who had come back from the jaws of death and the mouth of hell, the paramount longing at first was not for glory or honour, but just a natural boyish wish to 'have a good time,' and forget if possible some of the anguish through which they had passed. On the altar of duty Kinfell had at first offered up his love and then his life: he had kept back neither: and now that both seemed to

have been given back to him, he could not struggle any longer. Like a tired child he took what was given to him : and—like a homing-bird—came back to Barbara to be comforted because he could not fight any more.

As soon as Barbara saw him with his pale, pain-worn face and his empty sleeve, she forgot everything in her overwhelming desire to help and comfort him and make him well again. She ceased to want to marry him—she ceased to wish for Viola's death—she had no thought for anything save Hugh's complete recovery. For the time being she almost equalled her grandmother in the selfless and passionless quality of her love : which showed that the mid-Victorian phase of feminine sentiment was a true facet—though only one facet—of that priceless jewel, the love of woman. She gave herself up entirely to looking after Hugh, and to doing everything in her power to facilitate his recovery ; and also—which was a harder task—to endeavouring her utmost to console him in his bitter disappointment that from henceforward his work for the war would have to be accomplished at home : he could no longer be counted upon as a fighting man.

In the depths of her own depraved and very human heart Barbara rejoiced at this : it was happiness to her to know that Hugh could never again be exposed to the hardships and the horrors of trench warfare. But she was too wise a woman to let any sign of this joy escape her : she knew that she would probably forfeit Hugh's esteem, if not his love, if she did : so she held her peace and rejoiced in secret.

As for Hugh, he had gone through so much that he had entirely lost the power of hair-splitting and scruple-weighing. He had lived so entirely among the big things of life and death, that the smaller things had ceased to affect him. He accepted the comfort of Barbara's love and presence as simply as

a child would have done : he felt at rest and happy with her, and he left it at that. For the time being he put all thought of the future out of his mind, and humbly accepted every consolation that was offered to him. With returning health the problems of the past night awaken again to torture him : but for the present they were sleeping dogs which he was only too thankful to let lie.

He talked but little of the terrible happenings at the Front even to Barbara : they had gone too deep for that : but with some difficulty she broke through his reserve on one subject, namely, his experiences at Mons.

‘ You must tell me if you saw the angels,’ she begged him : ‘ I don’t want to bother you to talk about that horrid war-time because I know it upsets you ; but I do most dreadfully want to know if the story of the angels of Mons is true. It will make such a tremendous difference to me if it is.’

‘ Why ? ’ asked KinfeU.

‘ Because it will prove that God is really looking after us, and sending His angels to keep us in all our ways.’

‘ But if you are a Christian at all, surely you believe that without any illustrations.’

Barbara shrugged her shoulders. ‘ Oh ! of course I do—in a way. But it would be a tremendous help to my belief if I could see somebody who had seen the angels. I suppose it is faithless and perverse to seek after a sign : but, all the same, a sign is a great support at times. I dare say great saints can do without them, like Granny : but I’m not a saint, and I should like to feel that the story of the angels is really true.

KinfeU was silent for a few moments ; then he said, ‘ There is no doubt that many of the men did see things at Mons : but then people say that that

was because we were all so dreadfully knocked up and fagged out.'

'There are people who would say that the mountain full of chariots and horsemen was only the result of nerve-strain in Elisha's servant : and that the Apocalypse was merely a symptom of a neurotic breakdown on the part of S. John. But people who say things like that don't count : they are off the map, as far as I am concerned.'

'I agree with you there,' said Kinfell : 'I've no use for those doubting kind of blighters myself. But one hates to tell them anything because they make everything seem so common and sordid and cheap.'

'I dare say when the time comes they'll try to persuade themselves that the Day of Judgment is merely an attack of indigestion on their part,' added Barbara ; 'but I feel sure that circumstances will prove too strong for them.'

Kinfell laughed. 'So do I : the brutes !'

'Never mind those silly material old dunderheads, who have no more light save what filters through their own dusty crevices from outside. Tell me what you saw yourself at Mons.'

Again Kinfell was silent for a moment ; and when he spoke it was obviously with difficulty : he was not one of those people whose minds are free and common ground over which wayfaring men though fools cannot err or lose their way. 'I don't like talking of these things, Babs, because they somehow seem too sacred to be discussed : and if people laugh at them, and don't understand, one feels as if one has committed sacrilege. But I can tell *you* anything and everything. I know you will never laugh at me and will always understand.'

'Of course I shan't—and shall : shan't laugh and shall understand, I mean : so fire away.'

'Well, I saw nothing, until the first fighting was

over, and those of us who were left were retreating. It was getting dusk, and we were feeling pretty sick and didn't feel like talking much : there was nothing very cheerful to talk about. Two of my brother officers were riding in front, and the men were behind.

'Yes : and then ?' Barbara interpolated as he paused.

'Then suddenly I became conscious that a great army was marching in the distance alongside of us. At first I hoped it was some of our own reinforcements coming to our help, but then I knew it couldn't be as all our chaps were in khaki and this force was dressed in very light uniforms—white they looked in the dim light. Then I thought it was the Germans coming round to encircle us and cut off our retreat ; because their uniforms are much lighter than ours, you know.'

'And what happened then ?' asked Barbara, breathless with interest.

'Then I asked the chaps riding beside me if they saw it too.'

'And did they ?'

'Yes : they agreed with me that it was the enemy executing a flank movement to cut off our retreat. So we felt it was all up with us, and we rode on in despair. But the queer thing was that this great army did not come any nearer to us, nor did it advance in front : it just marched on alongside of us at a great distance. When we got to four cross-roads we thought we'd better know the worst and be put out of our misery : so we sent out scouts to ride in the direction of this unknown host and see what they were up to. And when the scouts came to the top of a hill from which they could see the country for miles round—well there wasn't any army at all.'

'Oh, Hugo, how splendid ! 'Of course they were angels ?'

‘Well, they weren’t British and they weren’t German; and if they weren’t angels I’m blest if I know what they were,’ replied Kinfell succinctly. ‘You see we were retreating at right angles from the German army; so that what we thought was the enemy wheeling round to encircle us was really an army between him and us, protecting us from any side movement of his.’

‘Then they didn’t look like angels with wings and things?’

‘Not to me. To me they looked just like an ordinary marching company in light uniform. But I believe some of the Tommies saw much more wonderful sights than this. In my own mind I have no shadow of doubt that we were in a very tight place, and that God sent His Hosts to get us out of it. But whether these Hosts appeared as an ordinary fighting company—or as angels in shining armour—or as a miscalculation on the part of the enemy—depended, I think, on the people who saw—or did not see—them.’

‘Even the most material people—the sort who would explain away the New Jerusalem itself—admit that the retreat from Mons was a miracle; or rather, would have been a miracle if there were such things as miracles at all,’ said Barbara; ‘and I agree with you that with regard to supernatural things—of which there really weren’t any, because everything is God’s doing and therefore natural and supernatural things are all one—the way in which they appear to us depends, like beauty, on the eye of the beholder. The materialists at Mons saw nothing but a fortuitous accident: nice, good, sensible, practical people like you, saw what looked like a common or garden army: while those men who were gifted with great spiritual insight saw shining angels with glittering swords. You all saw the same thing: but it appeared to you according to your different eyesights.’

‘I think you are about right there, Babs.. To argue that because one can’t see visions oneself they are therefore not to be seen, is as foolish as for a deaf man to argue that because he can’t hear the sound of a trumpet a trumpet makes no sound at all.’

‘Just as foolish,’ assented Barbara : ‘yet there are a lot of fools of that sort going about. But I’ve no use for them : they bore me. They really are worse than brute beasts, because I am sure that animals often see things that we can’t.’

‘Perhaps so,’ said Hugh thoughtfully. ‘Anyway there seems a general acceptance of the idea that the German horses refused to charge at Mons. One of my men says he saw them fall back again and again, when there was really nothing to account for it : and if they hadn’t we should all have been wiped out.’

‘Then you believe in the stories that more than once the Germans fell back because they saw reinforcements on our side coming over the hills, when there were really no hills and no reinforcements ?’

‘Most emphatically I do. But,’ added Hugh shyly, ‘I don’t altogether mean that these supernatural sort of affairs happen only when we are in a tight place : I believe that they’re always going on, but that it’s only when we are in a tight place that we are allowed to see them : like Elisha and the young man you were talking about, don’t you know ? The horses and chariots were there all the time : they weren’t just faked up for a special occasion. All Elisha did was to open the fellow’s eyes so that he could see for himself what was going on : and I believe that this old War is opening lots of people’s eyes in the same way.’

‘So do I, Hugo. I think that suddenly the veil between the material and the spiritual world has worn very thin, so that we get peeps through now and then. I don’t think it is worn into regular holes yet, or else we should see more clearly than we do : but it is so

thin in places that we get glimpses of the other side, though only dim and shadowy glimpses as one does through a threadbare stuff.'

'Yes : the War has made the Other World seem very near and real somehow.'

'I know, I know,' exclaimed Barbara : 'nowadays we read in the newspapers what formerly we only expected to read in the Bible.'

CHAPTER X

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

It so often happens that the happiness which we expect eludes us : but, as a compensation for this, the unhappiness which we anticipate is equally elusive. The proverbial slip betwixt the cup and the lip is as liable to occur when the cup is filled with pain as when it is filled with pleasure—the bitter draught is as slippery as the sweet one. Gloomy souls are fond of impressing us with the truism that life is uncertain : but they generally forget to add that death is uncertain too. The dark veil which hides the future is just as effective in concealing a sunny landscape as a cloudy one : and although we know not what a day may bring forth, the unknown day is generally as likely to bring forth joy as sorrow. Therefore it came to pass that Kinfell's convalescence at The Chevrons—to which Barbara had looked forward as to a time of almost unendurable strain and effort—turned out instead (at any rate in its earlier stages) to be one of those periods of rest and refreshment which are occasionally granted to weary pilgrims on their way.

Not only do circumstances often turn out different from what we expect : we ourselves do not always accept circumstances in the way in which we thought we should accept them : not only the future, but our power of dealing with the future, is hid from our eyes : therefore we do well neither to dread nor to anticipate the unknown too much ; but to seek the Kingdom of God, taking no thought for the morrow.

To Barbara's own surprise, her attitude towards

Hugh had entirely changed since she saw him last. For the time being, at any rate, the fierceness and passion of her love had died down : and in its stead had come a perfectly restful and contented feeling—the happiness of absolute mutual trust and comprehension. For the first time she was able to look through the golden haze and glamour of her love for Hugh to the steadfast reality at the back of it : to pierce through the rosy mist of morning with its cloud-clapped towers and gorgeous palaces, to the everlasting hills beyond.

It was not that she loved Hugh less than she had done before : she loved him infinitely more : but her love was of a deeper, calmer, fuller quality. At that time she chanced upon some lines in a book of verses, which exactly expressed her feelings :

‘ No more our hearts can feel the joy of spring :
The joy that came when wild March winds did blow,
The thrill of pleasure when our love was new :
But in its stead we have a better thing ;
The still delight of summer’s golden glow,
The peace of friendship that is tried and true.’

‘ That is just how I feel about Hugo,’ she said to herself : ‘ a sort of happy, peaceful feeling that nothing can alter or spoil. Even the fact that he is married to Viola doesn’t make any real difference to it, because it is the sort of love that could go on in another life where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, like the angels in heaven.’

So perfect now was the friendship between these two that they felt neither absence nor presence would make any difference to it, but only to their personal happiness which found its mainstay in each other’s society. Had they parted and not met again for twenty years, there would still be no break in the union of their souls.

'I believe if you and I were separated for fifty years we should begin again exactly where we left off,' Barbara said one day when she and Hugh were dilating upon the stability of the friendship between them.

'We couldn't do that because we should never have left off at all,' replied Kinfell: 'where there's no leaving off there can be no beginning again.'

Barbara nodded. 'One for you, Hugo: you've scored this time. Ours is a serial sort of friendship with "Continued in our next" written all over it.'

'Just so: and there'll be no real break in the story—only in the publication of the separate numbers.'

'And there'll be no need for a tiresome Synopsis at the beginning of each number,' Barbara added: 'because we shall always be well-up and word-perfect in the last instalment. We shan't forget anything that concerns the other, shall we, Hugo?'

'By Jove, no!'

'And it won't be *remembering*, it will be *knowing*,' said Barbara thoughtfully: 'in a real deep friendship like ours there's no past and no future; it is all present—or all part of the same thing going on for always, don't you know?'

'Yes, I know.' And Hugh's voice was very tender.

'It is a funny thing,' continued Barbara, 'that, ever since we became friends, whenever I felt grumpy or down in the mouth there invariably came a letter from you to cheer me up. I always knew that if the world seemed a howling wilderness and a hollow bubble, the next post would bring me a nice soothing epistle from you; and then the wilderness would cease from howling, and the bubble would solidify according to taste.'

'But I never knew you were down in the mouth when I wrote,' explained the literal Hugh.

'Of course you didn't, you dear old stupid! It

would have spoiled the whole thing if you 'd sat down to inscribe a deliberate letter of condolence. The beauty of the affair is that your subconscious mind or subliminal self, or whatever you call the creature, was in such perfect accord with my subconscious mind or subliminal self, that the two could wireless to one another without any interference from our ordinary, conscious selves. It's really rather a fine sort of business when you look into it; and shows that we are really greater friends than we think we are.'

'We must be tremendously great friends in that case,' said Kinfell.

'We are: that's what I'm trying to tell you all the time in my own simple, childish way. And I've come to the conclusion that friendship is really a far more peaceful and satisfying sort of thing than love.'

But the man in Hugh demurred at this. 'Oh! I don't know about that. Love is pretty jolly at its best, you know.'

'And so is friendship: quite as jolly and much less exhausting and feverish.'

'I agree with you that love without friendship is a pretty rotten thing, Babs, as I learned by bitter experience: but love and friendship together make a rather tasty mixture, don't you think?'

Barbara pursed up her lips with a doubtful expression: 'Yes, yes, perhaps so: but friendship without love is very grateful and comforting. I think perhaps the choicest brand of all is love which has "slowly broadened down" into friendship (like "freedom" into "precedent," you know); and retains the warming and soothing essence without the restless and disturbing frills. A feeling which is always on the boil must soon boil itself over: but a feeling which has just gone off the boil will simmer away for ever, and keep you permanently warm and cosy.'

Kinfell laughed. 'Still, I think it must once have

been on the boil, or else it will never simmer satisfactorily.'

'Perhaps so : but it is the simmering condition and not the boiling one which makes for peace and happiness. I think the really happy marriages are those which are founded on simmer and not on boil ; begun in boil and continued in simmer, to put it neatly,' Barbara replied with conviction. She had lately taken unto herself the second sceptre of womanhood—the staff which is called Bands ; and, finding it pleasant to hold and strong to lean upon, she did not mean to let it go. For a long time after her accident and its consequent disfigurement, she had cried aloud in her longing for the staff called Beauty, and in her anguish that it was so absolutely denied to her : but time had healed her wounds both spiritual and physical ; and now that she was no longer unsightly to look upon, she had ceased to pray for Beauty, though she had never left off longing for Bands—that is to say for a union with some twin soul, between herself and whom there would be the bond of a perfect understanding and sympathy. And this she had found in Kinfell.

During the winter and the early spring, while the days were cold and short, and he was still an invalid, Hugh was as happy as Barbara in the joy of their delightful comradeship. But as he came back to health and strength again—and as the breath of spring once more awakened the world to life—this brotherly and sisterly attitude ceased to satisfy him. Had they been twenty years older, it would probably have contented them both to their lives' end, and left them nothing better to long for. But Barbara was not yet thirty and Hugh was only a few years older : so that the calm haven of middle age was yet far ahead of them on their voyage through life. Being a woman—and the granddaughter of mid-Victorian

women—Barbara had schooled herself into contentment with Hugh's friendship, now that her conscience (also inherited from mid-Victorian grandmothers) forbade a closer tie : but Hugh was made of stronger stuff, and did not relish the present arrangement at all as soon as he ceased to be an invalid and returned to his normal feelings.

It was while matters were in this state—Barbara happy and contented and Hugh quite the reverse—that a bolt fell from the blue, destroying poor Barbara's new-found happiness in one fell swoop.

Kinfell was sitting smoking in the library one fine day waiting for Barbara to go out for a walk with him, when Caroline Windybank came into the room, carefully shutting the door behind her. Hugh naturally rose from his easy chair and took his pipe out of his mouth.

'Go on with your sitting down and your smoking, and anything else that will make things pleasanter for you,' said Miss Caroline, taking the seat on the opposite side of the fireplace : 'I've got something very disagreeable to say to you ; and I always think that disagreeable happenings are easier to bear if one is physically comfortable. You'd think that when one was unhappy one would be indifferent to little physical discomforts : but as a matter of fact one minds them all the more. I remember that when my father died, the trouble seemed ever so much worse because the dining-room chimney smoked. You'd have imagined that a bereaved family would never have noticed anything so trifling as a smoky chimney : but actually it seemed to make the bereavement ten times worse.'

'Well, what is the disagreeable thing that you have got to say to me ?' asked Kinfell, as Caroline paused to take breath.

'I hate saying it and you'll hate hearing it, but

that is neither here nor there,' continued Miss Windybank : ' our hatred won't count. And if there is an unpleasant thing to be done, it is best to do it at once and get it over.'

' If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly,' quoted Kinfell. ' You 've Shakespeare at your back, Miss Windybank.'

' But unfortunately this thing won't be done when it is done : it will be only just begun,' sighed Caroline.

' Then tell me what it is and put me out of my misery,' begged Kinfell.

' Well, to put it shortly, it is this—I can't put it pleasantly, or I would : but wrapping up disagreeable truths only makes the packet larger and therefore harder to swallow. The fact is that people are beginning to say horrid things about you and Barbara.'

' Confound their filthy tongues !' exclaimed Kinfell, his face as black as thunder.

' So I say ; but confounding people does no good, none at all. As you know, I hate saying all this, and I hate still more the spiteful gossips who have made me obliged to say it. But Barbara's father is dead, and her mother married again and at the other side of the world at that ; and she 'd be no use to Barbara if she wasn't : so that my mother and I are responsible for the child ; and it is our duty—and a very unpleasant duty—to see that she isn't talked about. Of course I know she is close on thirty, and therefore old enough to look after herself : but her loss of memory makes her much younger than her age, and I feel that we ought to be as careful of her as if she were twenty instead of thirty.'

' Yes, yes, I see that. Her ideas and her knowledge of life are still those of a young girl.'

' Exactly : and therefore we ought to be as careful of her as of a young girl, don't you see ? At least that is what Mother and I feel.'

‘The same remark applies to me,’ groaned Kinfell. ‘I, too, ought to be as careful of her as if she were a young girl.’

‘Certainly : I think you ought.’

‘But, after all, ours is an exceptional case,’ urged Hugh, pleading for mercy.

But it was not in Miss Windybank to mince matters. ‘There is no such thing as an exceptional case,’ she declared ; ‘because all cases are exceptional—to the people concerned.’

Hugh was silent for a few minutes, and Caroline’s heart ached to see the misery in his face. ‘Then what do you want me to do ?’ he asked at last.

‘Bless you, I don’t want you to do anything except just to go on as you are ! That ’s quite good enough for me. The question is what you *ought* to do—what is the right thing for you to do.’

‘Then what do you think is the right thing, Miss Windybank ? Tell me. I have great faith in your unfailing common-sense.’

‘Well, it seems to me there are only two courses open to you. Either to marry Barbara straight off, and take the risk of that tiresome Viola’s being still alive (which it would be just like a Chalfont to be, after you had learned to do better without her and had married again) : or else go away altogether, and leave Barbara free to forget you and to marry somebody else.’

Kinfell winced. ‘Then do you think if I went away she would marry somebody else ?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know about that : but it would give somebody else the chance of marrying her : and, to tell you the truth, I know somebody else who wants to do so : an R.A.M.C. man who met her at the hospital, when he came to do *locum* while the regular doctor was away. She doesn’t know this, but I saw it in his face.’

‘Then he hasn’t told her, you think ?’

‘ No : and I don’t see how he can, as long as you are filling up the front of the stage : and if he did, it would be no good, while she is completely absorbed in you.’

After another short silence Kinfell said : ‘ So you think I ought to go away and leave her free ? ’

‘ I didn’t say so. I said you ought to go away *or* to marry her. You can please yourself which.’

‘ But that is just what I can’t do, Miss Windybank. I’d gladly marry her—it is my heart’s desire to marry her—but she will not have me as long as there is any doubt as to Viola’s death.’

Caroline got up from her chair. ‘ Well, I wish to goodness Viola would do one thing or another—either be alive or dead ; but being her father’s daughter she is bound to take the course which will give most trouble all round. She wouldn’t be a Chalfont if she didn’t ! Still, if you won’t marry Barbara—or if she won’t marry you, which comes to the same thing—I don’t think you’ve any alternative, as an honourable man, but to go away, and leave her free to forget you as best she may, and to marry somebody else. I’m sorry to say it, but these blind-alley sort of love-affairs—going on interminably and leading to nowhere in the end—are not at all good things for girls, or for young men either : they leave them neither bound nor free. What I say is that Barbara ought definitely to be either married or single—just as Viola ought definitely to be either alive or dead. This half-and-half sort of attitude—“one foot on sea and one on shore”—is no good to anybody.’

Kinfell got up too, and leaned against the mantel-piece. ‘ It is a beastly state of things,’ he said gloomily ; ‘ but I can’t help feeling that you are right.’

‘ Of course I am : otherwise I shouldn’t have interfered. This “keeping company,” business is all very well for a time, if it is going to lead on to something else : but if it isn’t, it does harm all round, and especi-

ally to the woman. Men are always young enough to begin life over again, however old they may be ; but if a woman spends her youth walking up and down a cul-de-sac, she never arrives anywhere.'

At this juncture Barbara burst into the room, duly equipped for her walk. 'Whatever are you two discussing, closeted up together and looking as solemn as owls?' she exclaimed. 'You look as if the whole conduct of the War had suddenly been placed in your hands.'

'It is something on those lines,' replied her aunt, 'if not worse ! But if you will go for your walk, Hugh will tell you all about it.'

'Well, what is it ?' asked Barbara when they were clear of the house. 'Aunt Caroline said you were to tell me.'

Whereupon he told her : and as he told her, all the gladness faded from Barbara's face as if it had been wiped off with a sponge.

'I think it is absolutely loathsome of horrid spiteful gossips to spoil our happiness like this,' she exclaimed when he had finished : 'and just when we're settling down so comfortably to things as they are !'

'One always feels that gossip is hateful,' said Hugh ; 'but it is only the expression of public opinion. And though I don't go so far as to say that the voice of the people is the voice of God, I admit that it is very often the voice of common-sense.'

'Then do you mean to say that you think these vile scandal-mongers are right ?' asked Barbara, looking up in surprise at the tall figure striding along beside her.

'In a way, yes,' replied Hugh, who was always just ; 'though I hate them as much as you do for being right—more than I should if they were wrong. But it isn't a good thing for any girl to have a lingering love-affair which won't end in anything :

and if it is with a married man it makes it ten times worse.'

'But ours isn't exactly a love-affair,' argued Barbara, feeling as if she were fighting for her very life.

'Then what is it?'

'It is a beautiful and perfect friendship which will last us all our lives in whatever future worlds those lives will be spent.'

'Oh! it will be all right in those future lives; I'm not worrying about them. The difficulty is with this present life,' said Kinfell ruefully.

'Stuff and nonsense! Do you mean to say you are so antediluvian and out-of-date that you don't believe in a real friendship between a man and a woman?'

Hugh shook his head: 'Not when they are in love with each other.'

'But we are no longer in love with each other.'

'Yes we are, my dear—at least I am, and I have my doubts about you.'

'We love each other, but that is not necessarily being in love with each other: it is something far greater and broader and finer. I am sure that the feeling which binds old married people together is much more friendship than what is commonly called love.'

'But we are neither old nor married, and that makes all the difference,' remarked Hugh pertinently. 'No, Babs dear, it is no use blinking things: it is much better to look matters straight in the face: and the truth is that things cannot go on like this.'

Barbara fairly wailed. 'Oh, Hugo, and I'm so happy!'

'But I'm not: I haven't been for weeks: and now that I hear that I am getting you talked about, I am less happy than ever.'

'But, Hugo, now that you have lost your dear arm

you are so dependent upon me. You'll never be able to do without me.'

'I'm not proposing to do without you, my darling : I'm proposing to have you all to myself. Look here, Babs ! Let's put an end once and for all to this uncertainty. Marry me, and we'll face the risk of Viola's ever turning up. The happiness will be worth it ten times over.'

'No, no ; I *can't* marry you till I know for certain that Viola is dead. Don't ask me to.'

'But I do ask you to. Now that I am hurt and maimed I can't do without you, Babs : I literally can't : and, after all, I believe we are spoiling our lives for a mere fancy : I feel no doubt in my own mind that Viola is dead.'

'But we don't know it for certain.'

'We *can't* know it for certain—we can *never* know it for certain,' urged Kinfell : 'and if, as I believe, she is dead, it seems an awful shame to spoil both our lives for nothing. All the detectives and lawyers and people feel certain she is dead, or we must have heard something about her during all these years. If she had been alive she would have seen one of my advertisements, or else the detectives would have got upon her trail somehow.'

They were walking past a gate, and they pulled up to look over it and to enjoy the view which was thus revealed to them. They always stood still to look at the view whenever they passed this particular gate.

'How beautiful it all is !' exclaimed Barbara, drinking in the sweet spring air.

'All the world is chock-full of beauty just waiting for you and me to enjoy it if you'll only be sensible,' entreated Kinfell : 'but it will be wasted and no good to us whatever if we are not together. So do be sensible, darling, and take my word for it that Viola is dead, and marry me out of hand.'

But Barbara shook her head. 'I can't marry you till I am sure,' she said.

'Then you'll never marry me, for you'll never be surer than you are now: you can't be.'

'If God means me to marry you, He'll find a way of making us surer: you may depend upon that, Hugo.'

Hugh bit his lip and looked over the gate with eyes that were too misty to see the distant view: then he said, 'Look here, Babs, there is nothing that you and I can't say to one another, and I don't mind owning that at one time I hesitated to marry you because I thought that if we had a son, and Viola turned out to be alive after all, it would be so rough on him not to inherit the title and estates. But since the War, everything has gone into the melting-pot, and somehow titles and estates and things like that don't seem to matter any more. Probably twenty years hence there won't be any such things as titles and estates left for anybody to inherit. Let us leave the future to take care of itself, darling, and marry and be happy.'

Barbara laid her hand tenderly upon his remaining arm. 'There is one thing that has never gone into the melting-pot, and never will, Hugo—and that is the difference between right and wrong. In fact it seems stronger since the War than it did before, and I shall never feel it right to marry you till I know for certain that you are free to marry me. You know that awful speech about the dreadful day of judgment in the marriage-service? Well, I could never stand up to it unless I was absolutely certain that there was no impediment to our marriage in the shape of Viola.'

Kinfell turned his face away and his voice shook. 'Then we shall have to part altogether, Babs. It must be all or nothing between you and me.'

Barbara began to cry. 'Don't think me horrid,

Hugo, or indifferent to your happiness : it will break my heart not to be with you now that you need help and care as you never needed them before : but I cannot—I dare not—marry you, as long as there is a doubt as to Viola's death. But I shall always love you—always.'

And with that cold comfort poor Hugh had for the nonce to be content.

This was by no means the last conversation they had upon the subject : again and again Kinfell endeavoured to convince Barbara that his wife was dead, and that it was madness to allow the ghost of a dead woman to stand between them and their happiness. Barbara remained adamant. Miss Windybank ranged herself upon Hugh's side, and urged his suit in and out of season, whenever she and her niece were alone together. She herself had no doubt that her other niece was dead, and therefore she could not understand how anybody else could have any doubt either. To Caroline's mind no door-nail was deader than was Viola Kinfell : therefore Barbara's objection to marrying Viola's husband dwindled into a silly and sentimental scruple.

But Mrs. Windybank saw otherwise. It was she who had taught Barbara to discover the clearness of the dividing line between good and evil ; and she therefore supported the girl who was carrying out her teaching.

'My love,' she said one day to her granddaughter, 'if God shuts a door in your face, never try to force it open. He will open it fast enough if He wishes it to be opened : and if He doesn't, it is best kept shut.'

'It is such a comfort to me, Granny, that you see the thing as I do,' Barbara remarked : 'Hugh and Aunt Caroline think I am dotty in imagining Viola to be still alive : but I somehow believe she is, though all the evidence seems to point the other way. And as

long as I believe this, I cannot see that it would be right to marry Hugh.'

'Neither do I, my love. Personally I agree with Caroline and Hugh that Viola must be dead, or else we should have heard something of her by this time : but as long as you do not think so, you cannot act as if you did. If you believe a thing to be wrong, it is wrong of you to do that thing, even if in itself the thing is perfectly innocent. The fact that another person does not believe it to be wrong, in no way absolves you. The thing that really matters is obedience to the Will of God : the way in which this obedience is exercised is merely a matter of detail.'

'Yes : that is how it strikes me,' said Barbara eagerly : 'obedience is to do what God tells you—not what He tells somebody else.'

'It seems to me, that there are very few things intrinsically wrong in themselves,' Mrs. Windybank continued : 'but they are wrong to those people who believe them to be wrong : because to do what you believe to be wrong is to act in opposition to the law of righteousness. Even an action that was quite harmless in itself might be an occasion of deadly sin to certain people, who—even if mistakenly—thought it to be sinful.'

Barbara nodded. 'I dare say to everybody else the journey from Pethor to Moab was in itself quite an innocent little excursion ; but it roused the open opposition both of the ass and the angel when Balaam attempted it after he had been forbidden.'

So Barbara had her way ; and once again she and Hugh parted because she would not consent to marry him. Matters had gone too far with Kinfell for him to be content with her mere friendship ; and though she might have continued on the brotherly and sisterly plane if he had supported her, she was not strong enough to stand there by herself when he showed her

so obviously that he was more her lover than her friend. His attitude could not fail to affect hers : and as soon as she realised this, Barbara also felt that it was time for them to separate.

‘ Perhaps when we are quite old we can be friends again,’ she said wistfully to Kinfell.

He shook his head. ‘ You will never be old to me, Babs.’

‘ Well, anyway we shall both be really old some day, and then we’ll have a shot at the friendship arrangement again. Anyway, Hugo, please “ leave me this, I charge thee, my last hope,” to support me during the dreary days till I have finally drained the last dregs of youth.’

But Hugh made up his mind to do the honourable thing by her, and to enable her if possible to forget him and marry some one else. Though this course was agony to him, he persisted in it, and decreed that the correspondence between himself and Barbara—the greatest delight of his life for the past five years—should cease. He would go back to Ingleham Moat and drag out his remaining years there, doing such work for his country as was still possible to him in his maimed condition : and Barbara was to stay at Northbridge and go on with her nursing at the V.A.D. hospital, for which she was now once more quite strong enough. Work was all that was left to them.

So Hugh went back to Ingleham and Barbara stayed at home. And both of them felt that their lives were over, and that the light of their days was permanently darkened.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN TIMPANY, D.S.O.

WITH regard to love-affairs, as with regard to everything else, it never rains but it pours : and when a woman has one lover, he is generally the harbinger of another. In accordance with this rule, the very next day after Hugh had gone back to Ingleham and before Barbara had begun work again at the hospital, she was sitting alone in the library at The Chevrons, her grandmother and aunt having gone out to pay some calls, when the maid announced, 'Captain Timpany.' Barbara rose to meet a fine, khaki-clad figure with a D.S.O. ribbon on his chest, whom she at once recognised as the recalcitrant Harold of her first days at Northbridge : but Harold with a difference. He had been through the furnace of twelve months at the Front, and it had burned up the old Harold and raised a new and a superior one out of the ashes. Of course Barbara did not see this all at once : but her sharp eyes saw enough to tell her that in some subtle way Harold Timpany had grown to be a man.

'You 'll be surprised to see me,' he said after they had shaken hands and said the usual things and sat down again : 'but I am home on short leave : and I have been thinking so much about you all the time that I've been at the Front, that I felt I must come and see you while I was in England.'

'It was very good of you to come, and I am very glad to see you, and I want to hear all about you since last we met,' said Barbara graciously.

But Harold shook his head. 'No, Barbara, it isn't good of me to come, and you have no call to be glad to see me, though it is very nice of you to put it like that. I've done with frills: you've no use for them out there, you see: and I'm not going to beat about the bush. I behaved like a cad years ago: and I shall know no peace of mind till I've told you so and begged your pardon.'

For a moment Barbara was nonplussed. This new, determined Harold took her breath away. 'Never mind the past, Harold: it has been dead and buried for ages now, so why dig it all up again? It is wise to let sleeping dogs lie, and still more necessary to let dead ones,' she expostulated feebly.

But Harold meant to have his say, and would not be silenced. 'It's all very well to try and put me off, but it's no go. I've come all this way to say a certain thing and I mean to say it. I never realised what a cad I'd been till I got out there: but there everything looked different from what it did here, and I began to see things as they really are. Then I saw what a brute as well as a fool I'd been: and the more I tried to forget it, the more I thought about it: and I made up my mind that if the Huns allowed me ever to come home again, I'd come and see you and make a clean breast of it.'

'I don't want your clean breast as you call it, my good Harold. It looks quite clean enough as it is, with your lovely D.S.O. ribbon on it, and I'm sure you needn't make it any cleaner for me.'

Captain Timpany took no notice of this interruption. 'I really was in love with you all the time: far more than I'd any idea of: and I've never cared a rap for any woman since.'

'But it was naturally a shock to you to see how the tiresome old railway accident had disfigured me,' said Barbara hastily; 'and it choked you off. Nobody

could blame you for that : any man would have felt the same. It was really my own fault for not telling you and letting you see me from the beginning as I was.'

'But it didn't choke me off : that is where I was to blame. Some men would have been choked off by a thing like that : I don't deny it : and they are the sort of men that aren't worth thinking about. But I knew better : I wasn't like that. The real me loved you just the same as when I thought you beautiful : it was only a rotten sort of superficial me that worried about your disfigurement, and let it come between us.'

'Still it was an awful disfigurement ! I don't mind owning that, now it has disappeared,' said Barbara.

'It doesn't matter what sort of a disfigurement it was : that is just my point. What I loved was the real you—the good, jolly, companionable you—quite apart from your looks. And yet I let your looks come between us. There are lots of men who only love girls because of their looks : heaps of them : and a jolly rotten sort of love it is, to my thinking. But I wasn't that sort : I loved you in quite a different way : and yet I behaved as if I was.'

'I see. You mean that you were false to your best self as well as to me.' Barbara was quick enough to catch a point if she set herself to do so.

'Exactly. You've caught on. Now what I've learned out there, among a lot of other things, is this : that the unpardonable sin is to be false to the best that is in you. I'm not good at putting things, but you are so sharp you'll know what I mean.'

Barbara nodded.

'I loved you with my best self,' Harold went on, 'yet I let my second-best self come between us. I behaved as if I was just the ordinary kind of blighter who cares for nothing in a woman but her pretty face.'

And then I was so darned conceited, that I wouldn't own even to myself what a mistake I'd made and what a fool I'd been. But out there—when I was allowed a little holiday from the Boches—I'd time to think : and I saw the thing as it really is. I thought about it a good deal. And I made up my mind, if ever I got back to dear old Blighty, I'd come straight and tell you that I'd always loved you, and ask you to forgive me and to marry me. I know I don't deserve it, and if you say *No*, I'll stand up to it like a man. But I felt I must ask you.'

Barbara's eyes filled with tears. 'And it was awfully nice of you, Harold : because you didn't know that I wasn't just the same to look at as when you went away.'

'Of course I didn't. I see now that the results of that confounded accident have all disappeared, and that you are as good-looking as any girl need be. But that is neither here nor there. What I want you to understand is that I love you quite apart from looks ; simply because you are you, and the jolliest and most sympathetic companion that any man ever had, and looks have nothing whatever to do with it.'

'Thank you, Harold. You have paid me a great compliment,' said Barbara simply.

'I don't know about that. I only felt it was due to you—and to myself—to tell you the whole truth.'

Barbara smiled inwardly at the additional clause 'and to myself.' There was still a good deal of the old Adam—or, rather, of the old Harold—left in Captain Timpany.

'And now,' he continued, 'having told you that I see what a cad I was and how thoroughly I am ashamed of it, I want to know if you will let bygones be bygones and marry me ?'

'I'm afraid I can't do that, Harold.'

Captain Timpany got up and began to walk about

the room. 'I see. You can't forgive me for the way in which I treated you all those years ago. And I don't blame you. It serves me jolly well right.' And then he looked out of the window so that Barbara should not see his face.

'It isn't that a bit, Harold. You're utterly wrong this time. I forgave you years ago—if I had anything to forgive.'

'You'd have married me then, if I'd asked you. Now wouldn't you, Barbara?'

Barbara was silent for a moment: then she said, 'I believe I should, but it would have been a great mistake.'

'Not it! I'd have made you happy enough. But I had my chance and threw it away, and it serves me jolly well right!' And the young soldier's voice was very sorrowful.

'As a matter of fact,' said Barbara thoughtfully, 'I like you better now than ever I did. I've never admired you so much as I do to-day after what you've said. But I was young in those days, and very much in love with Love as all girls are: and I mistook Love for you.'

'Then can't you mistake us again?' asked Captain Timpany, turning round with hope once more shining through his handsome features.

Barbara shook her head. 'I'm afraid I can't, Harold: because I've met the real thing since then.'

Harold's face fell once more. 'Then some other man has won you, lucky beggar! Well, as I said before, I had my chance and threw it away, and now it is the other blighter's turn to make good. When are you going to be married?'

'Never. It is a long story, but you and I are such old friends that I should like to tell it to you: and, after all, you saved my life, Harold, so that whatever affects me is in some sort of a way your business too.'

But first, tell me about yourself, and how you won your D.S.O. My business will wait.'

'There's nothing to tell. It was just a footling sort of job that any other fellow would have done in my place. Nothing to write home about. Tell me your story. That is what I want to hear.'

So Barbara—who had a great knack of knowing what people really wanted, and giving it to them if she could—told Captain Timpany the whole story.

'It's a queer business,' he said when she had finished: 'a very queer business. And from my heart I pity both you and Lord Kinfell. It seems pretty rough on you both to be parted, when in all probability he is as free to marry as I am: yet on the other hand you'd both be in a pretty fix if you married and her ladyship turned up afterwards. I call it deuced hard luck on you both.'

'It is, Harold: deuced hard, as you say! But it would be harder still if we did marry, and then Viola turned out not to be dead after all. Don't you think I am right to refuse to marry Hugh, however much I love him? I should always feel that he was half Viola's, and I couldn't stand a semi-detached husband.'

'Don't ask my opinion, Barbara: I am too much concerned personally to be able to give impartial advice. But one thing I must say and you must remember it: as long as I live I shall be waiting for you to marry me if ever you feel inclined to do so: if you get tired of this half-and-half vapoury sort of business, and feel you'd like to settle down and have a home of your own, I'm your man. I shall always be there, and always ready for you if you give the word, do you see? And even if this old War does me out and I'm not there waiting for you any longer, I am glad for you to know that I really did love you with the best that was in me, and that I realised in time what a cad I had been, and begged your pardon.'

Barbara rose from her chair and crossed the room to where he was standing : 'That 's all right, Harold,' she said, holding out both her hands which he promptly took : 'and everything is quite square between us now. And you must always remember that wherever you are or whatever you do, if you need a true friend who is interested in everything that concerns you, I'm your woman. Nothing can spoil our friendship, or make it less deep and true : it is of the unshrinkable make and will wear for ever.'

'And don't you think you could marry me, dear ?' begged Harold wistfully. 'Not even now I know the whole story, and quite understand that you can't love me as you might have done years ago ? I'd be content with ever so little love, Barbara, if only you'd let me love you, and make you happy.'

'But it wouldn't be fair to you to marry me, when I was in love with another man.'

'I'd risk it. I'd rather you did that than didn't marry me at all. Because I know that when once you were my wife you'd always play the game.'

Barbara shook her head. 'I don't see how I could play the game, Harold dear, when I'd got a king up my sleeve all the time ! And now I hear Granny and Aunt Caroline banging the front-door, so prepare to receive a charge of relations. They *will* be surprised to see you !'

And indeed they were : and they all had a delightful tea together, and talked and talked till it was time for Harold to say good-bye and ride off on his motor-bicycle to Merchester.

'That Timpany creature is much improved,' said Miss Windybank as soon as he had gone : 'the War has done him a world of good. It has made a gentleman of him.'

'Better than that, my dear,' replied her mother : 'it has made a man of him.'

‘He wanted to marry me,’ remarked Barbara ; ‘and was really awfully nice about not wanting to do it before.’ And then she told them how Harold had made the *amende honorable*.

‘He was always good underneath his outside boulderishness,’ said Miss Windybank ; ‘and quite decent when he ceased to bound. But the War has turned him, as it has turned the world, upside down, and so the underlying niceness has come to the top.’

And her mother and her niece quite agreed with her.

After Barbara had gone to bed that night Mrs. Windybank said : ‘I believe that this will be the solution of all our troubles. I have been so terribly anxious about Barbara and Hugh ; and now I think the dear girl is going to be happy after all, but not in the way that I hoped.’

‘You mean that she will marry the Timpany person, and live happy ever afterwards ?’

‘I do, my dear. My desire was that in some way we should obtain proof of Viola’s death, and that then Hugh and Barbara could marry with a clear conscience. But it seems that this is not to be, and that my prayers for the dear child’s happiness are to be answered in another way. I have found it is so often like this in life. We worry so terribly about the future ; and then we find that the future is quite different from what we expected it to be, and that the particular difficulties we dreaded never occur at all.’

Caroline nodded in acquiescence : ‘I know. The lion in the path turns out not to be a lion at all, but some more fearful wild-fowl : or, still more likely, no such thing, but only Snug the joiner : or, as in this case, Timpany the manufacturer.’

‘Timpany the Captain now, my love.’

‘Well, Captain if you prefer it, Mother : it certainly sounds better.’

‘Of course I would have preferred her to marry dear Hugh,’ said Mrs. Windybank, who was always by nature prone to look on the gloomy side of a question: ‘but I do not at all see how she can do so without proof of Viola’s death.’

‘Then why worry about it? You are never satisfied, Mother. I wanted her to marry Hugh, as you know: and I didn’t see any reason why she shouldn’t. I should have thought that by this time Viola was dead enough to satisfy anybody, and I should marry the man without a quahn if I were Barbara. But I’m not. I don’t see how she can marry him while she believes his wife is still alive, though how she can believe such nonsense passes my comprehension!’

Mrs. Windybank sighed. ‘People can’t control their beliefs any more than they can control their feelings.’

‘Well, you can’t have it both ways. Barbara can’t keep Viola as a live cousin and Hugh as a live husband, at the same time. She must give up one of them, and it seems as if it must be Hugh. So that door is closed. And it appears to me most providential that the Timpany creature should have turned up again in the very nick of time. He is not Hugh, I admit: but he can’t help that: and he is much improved, and a soldier and a D.S.O., and all sorts of quite creditable things. And, when all is said and done, a bachelor in the hand is worth half a dozen demi-semi-widowers in the bush.’

Mrs. Windybank smiled. ‘Of course, my love, you must not let Barbara think that we believe she will eventually marry Captain Timpany.’

Caroline snorted. ‘My dear Mother, do you take me for a fool?’

‘Never: never for a moment, Caroline.’

‘Though only an old maid myself (for which on my knees I thank Heaven fasting!) I have sense enough

to know that every love is one's first and final and only love—as long as it lasts : and also that the best cure for an old love is a new one.'

'Still, I cannot help pitying poor Hugh,' said Mrs. Windybank with a sigh.

'Neither can I : though when all is said and done he has no one but himself to thank. If he hadn't been such a fool as to marry a Chalfont for her looks, he'd be free to marry a Lane for her virtues. As I said before, you can't have it both ways : and if you marry a Chalfont, you won't have it in even one way, as poor Julia found out to her cost !'

'It is a great relief to me to see land at last !' said Mrs. Windybank, getting up and lighting her bedroom candle : 'for to tell you the truth, Caroline, I was utterly at sea as to what to hope or wish or pray for the dear child. But now it is borne in upon me that Captain Timpany is the solution to our problems, and I cannot tell you how thankful I feel. It is such a weight off my mind' (Mrs. Windybank was as strong as her Caroline in the belief that nothing will help a woman to forget a man as quickly as another) : 'although I cannot refrain from grieving that Viola's wrongdoing has practically spoiled poor Hugh's life.'

'Wrongdoing always spoils something,' replied Caroline : 'there is no getting away from it. There are two things in this world that you can't smother—sin and the smell of paraffin. Whatever you do with them, they will out.'

'I am afraid you are right, my love,' sighed Mrs. Windybank ; 'as this lamp has been proving to us for the last half-hour.'

'Good luck to the Timpany creature !' added Caroline as she put the lamp out : 'and may he have the sense to go on proposing to Barbara till she accepts him in self-defence ! There's nothing like

persistence for wearing a woman down, however much she may dislike a man at the beginning.' .

And thus Barbara's kinswomen decided Barbara's fate, whilst she lay asleep in the rose-tinted room and dreamed of Harold Timpany ; for people's dreams—like their feelings and their beliefs—are not always under their own control.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

WHEN Hugh got back to Ingleham he wrote to Barbara proffering a last request ; namely that she should come once to Ingleham Moat, and see the beautiful and ancient home of which he was so proud. Barbara, nothing loath, agreed ; as she felt it would be a comfort to her, in the dreary days to come, to be able to picture her lover in his own home and amidst his customary surroundings. Also Hugh had talked so much to her about Ingleham Moat, that she longed to see for herself this perfectly preserved relic of a bygone age.

‘I will come just once, Hugo, and then we must say good-bye,’ she wrote to him : and he, with anguish in his heart, agreed. Miserable as it was to part, it was still more miserable to go on seeing each other with the image of Viola still standing between them with her drawn sword, guarding the gates of Paradise from their approach.

If only Barbara could have remembered her fatal journey down from London to Merchester, all this misery would have been avoided. But Barbara did not remember it : showed no signs of being able to remember it : and Dr. Culpepper now gave little hope that she ever would. Of course neither she nor Kin-fell had any idea that her loss of memory was really the sole barrier between them : if they had had any such inkling, Barbara would have gone back to New Zealand long before the War began, to test the one

chance now left that a return to the scenes of her earlier life would awaken her dormant memory : but, as far as they knew, that memory held nothing but recollections of an ordinary girlhood, without which Barbara was not actually a penny the worse. It was difficult to see how the remembrance of a girlhood spent with a father who was dead, a mother who had married again, and a brother who had also married and formed new ties, could greatly enhance the happiness of a woman who had her own life and interests on the other side of the world. So the idea of returning to New Zealand and putting her sleeping memory to this final test, had gradually vanished from Barbara's scheme of practical politics.

As the proprieties forbade Barbara's staying with Lord Kinfell at Ingleham, and as it was too far to go there and back from Northbridge in one day, she and her aunt ran up to London for a couple of nights to enable Miss Windybank to get a day's shopping, whilst her niece paid a visit to poor Hugh at his own home.

It was a perfect spring day when Barbara went down to Ingleham to say good-bye to Hugh : the old house had never looked lovelier in all its six centuries. In the surrounding woods no two trees were of the same shade of green : and the wealth of forget-me-nots in the garden beyond the moat formed an exquisite contrast to the rose-coloured brick walls reflected in the brown water. Certainly Nature had done her best to paint a perfect picture for Barbara to carry away and dream about till her life's end.

Hugh met her at Sevenash in his little car, which, alas ! he could no longer drive himself. They could not say much to each other with the chauffeur—Kinfell's wounded and discharged orderly—sitting in front and listening to every word : but they held each other's hand under the rug, in ecstasy at being

together even for the last time. No fear of future misery could quite rob the present of its bliss : for the moment they were together, and that was enough.

After a short time Barbara's attention was diverted from Hugh to the beautiful country through which they were passing : she was driving through one of the loveliest parts of one of the loveliest of English counties ; for there are few places on earth more entrancing to the eye than certain parts of Kent on a spring day. The woods especially enchanted her with their wealth of varied green.

'Oh, how lovely, how perfectly lovely !' she exclaimed : 'and they remind me of something I have seen before. I think they must be like the woods in New Zealand through which I used to motor with my father. At least Mother wrote to me that Father took me always with him in his rounds in his little car, and that I used to adore it ; but of course I can't remember it myself.'

'But you seem to remember that it was through woods ?' said Kinfell.

'Well, Hugo, I can hardly put it as definitely as that. All I can say is that I seem dimly to remember going quickly ages ago through woods like these : and as I have never been here before—and as I have never done any motoring since I came to England—I can only conclude that my subconscious mind, or my subliminal self, or whatever you choose to call it, is recalling my motor rides through the woods at home.'

'All of which rather seems to point to the conclusion that Culpepper is right, and that a return to your old home would restore your lost memory.'

'Perhaps when the War is over—if it ever is over—I will go back to New Zealand and look for the thing,' said Barbara.

'I say, Babs, if you do take this trip, you'll let me foot the bill, won't you ?' asked Kinfell boyishly.

‘ You know that as long as I live I shall always adore doing anything for you : and, after all, I am your cousin’s husband, and so—after your brother—your nearest male relation.’

‘ We ’ll see about that when the time comes,’ replied Barbara lightly. ‘ The obstacles to the trip at present are not the expenses, but mines and torpedoes ; and even such an obliging person as you cannot remove those difficulties at a word. After all it is no use throwing good money after bad, and losing my life on the off-chance of regaining my memory. The one wouldn’t be much good to me without the other.’

‘ And nothing would be any good to me any more,’ replied Hugh, squeezing the hand that lay in his under the rug. ‘ Even if I do not see you, it will make the world habitable to me to know that you are still in it : but if you were gone, I should blow my brains out. I simply couldn’t go on living any longer.’

‘ Nonsense, Hugo ! That again would be throwing good money after bad.’

By that time they were approaching Ingleham Moat, and Hugh began pointing out to Barbara the beauties of his ancestral home. She was as enthusiastic as he knew she would be, and almost equalled him in her delight over the beautiful old house lying like a jewel in its setting of brown water, green lawns, and blue forget-me-nots. But as they neared the drawbridge over the moat she suddenly became silent and put her hand to her forehead. ‘ What is it, darling ? Do you feel ill ? ’ asked Hugh softly, his face drawn with anxiety.

‘ No, no,’ she answered impatiently with a dazed look in her grey-green eyes : ‘ but I don’t understand.’

At that moment the car stopped, and simultaneously the great oak door on the other side of the bridge was thrown open by the old retainer who had taken the place of Gittens while the latter went to fight for

his country. Kinfell sprang out of the car, and gave his one hand to Barbara as she alighted, and then led her across the bridge into the paved courtyard. But to his surprise she quickly dropped his guiding hand, and—with that strange, rapt look still on her face—walked in front of him across the courtyard and straight into the library. In distress he followed her, feeling sure that she was ill, or else she would never behave in this strange fashion.

‘Do tell me what is the matter, my sweet,’ he urged, as soon as the door was shut and they were alone together in the room: ‘I am sure you are not well.’

Barbara made no direct reply, but stood in the middle of the room with her hand to her forehead. ‘The library,’ she murmured; ‘yes, the library: with the books all round the walls and the door leading into the courtyard. It is all coming back to me.’

‘What is coming back to you? In the name of Heaven, what are you driving at, Babs?’

Still Barbara spoke as one in a dream. ‘And the forget-me-nots, too! they were always so lovely in the spring: and the red walls reflected in the brown water.’

‘Oh! Babs, what is the matter? I am sure you are ill,’ said Kinfell with distress in his voice: ‘tell me, dear—’

With a cry Barbara interrupted him: ‘Oh! Hughie, don’t you see what has happened? My memory has come back at last! I can remember it all now: the moat and the bridge and the courtyard and this room. The minute I saw it again it all came back to me.’

Kinfell sank into a chair, his face as white as a sheet. But he never took his eyes off the woman standing in the middle of the room, with a look in her beautiful eyes as of one just awakened out of sleep. ‘Good

Heavens, Babs ! What are you talking about ? ' he exclaimed, as the incredible truth slowly 'percolated to his consciousness.

Barbara put both hands to her forehead as if to clear her bewildered brain. ' Oh, Hughie, it all comes back to me with a rush ! How I was angry with you, and ran away in order to punish you, because I thought you were too strict. Don't you know me ? I am Viola.'

And Viola indeed she was ; but a better if a less beautiful Viola than she of the days that were past ; a Viola who had lost her physical beauty, and had thereby gained that beauty of the spirit which Time and Death are alike powerless to touch. As long as she possessed it her personal loveliness had proved too heavy a handicap for her higher nature to surmount : it was indeed dwarfing the growth of her spirit and dragging her soul down to hell : but with this barrier of the flesh once removed, the fine character, which had always lain dormant under her more superficial charms, was enabled to develop as God had meant it to develop : and her spirit was now as beautiful as her body once had been. She had entered into life maimed as far as her beauty was concerned : but she had thereby gained her soul.

Hugh was trembling like a leaf. For a second—strong man though he was—he thought he was going to faint ; but by an effort of will he soon pulled himself together. Of course it was Viola : now that she said it he realised it at once and recognised his wife—but a wife so changed that only the eyes and hair seemed part of the old Viola. He could not understand, now that he knew the truth, how he had failed to recognise her at once ; but her beauty had been so distinctly the outstanding characteristic of the old Viola, that Viola without her beauty did not seem to be Viola at all. Her beauty had not only loomed too

large in her own eyes, but also in the eyes of her husband : it had blinded him as well as herself to the deeper and better qualities which it so successfully hid.

But although Hugh's conscious mind had been dazzled by Viola's physical beauty, his subconscious self had seen the truth more clearly, and had twice over recognised its kindred soul. When first he met Viola he had fallen in love with her, as he imagined for her beauty : but it really went far deeper than that. Her beauty was merely the excuse : not the reason. And so when he met her again as Barbara, his soul once more recognised its mate, and loved her better than it loved itself : for true love is a thing not of the body nor even of the mind ; but an indissoluble bond between two spirits whom God has fore-ordained from the beginning to be one.

And in Viola's case although her mind had forgotten, her heart had remembered ; love held the key to the whole situation. She had loved Ingleham Moat in the old days as far as it was possible to her unawakened self to love anybody or anything : and therefore, when she beheld the beloved place once more, her memory came back. Had she loved her husband as she had loved her home, she would have known him again at once : but in the old days he had never touched her heart, and so her heart held no memory of him. Hugh's soul had been braced and strengthened by adversity, and so was able when first he met her to recognise its mate : but poor Viola's soul had been so stifled and smothered by admiration and adulation and the other spiritual drawbacks incidental to her physical beauty, that it was not able to recognise its mate even when she saw him—not in fact until as Barbara she met him, after the iron of her disfigurement had entered into and strengthened her soul. But with her—as indeed with all of us if we only have the power to realise it—the iron was no weapon

forged by Fate the Avenger, but a tonic administered by Love the Healer to make her perfectly whole.

‘I remember it all now: I ran away because I was tired of you, Hughie,’ she continued, reverting unconsciously to the name by which she had called him in their married days.

Hugh interrupted her, his voice hoarse with emotion. ‘Yes, yes, and who did you run away with?’

Viola did not look at him: her eyes were still straining into the past. ‘Not with anybody, of course: I just ran away by myself to go to Merchester. And then in the train I met my cousin, Barbara Lane, and she persuaded me to go with her to Granny’s. And then there was an awful crash: and I cannot remember anything more till I awoke in Merchester Hospital.’

Hugh sat stock still like a man in a dream. ‘Viola! my wife!’ was all he said; but he knew in the very depths of his soul that she was speaking the truth. And he also knew in the very depths of his soul that he had never really doubted her: little as he had understood her in the old days he had always recognised her innate purity. Viola might run away from her husband: in fact that was precisely what she had done: but she could never have run away with another man. Of that vileness she was incapable.

Then at last she turned and looked at him; and at the sight of his white face she came back from the past to the present. ‘My poor darling!’ she exclaimed, stretching out her arms to him: ‘how could I ever have been such a fool as not to love you—you whom I now adore with every little bit of me? But I was a beast to you; and now you will never be able to forgive me as long as you live.’ And she began to cry.

Whereupon Hugh sprang from his seat, and crossing the room to where she stood, encircled her with his one arm, showering kisses on her bowed head. Amid

all his stunning bewilderment one thought shone out clearly : she was his wife, and nothing could part them any more : that was all that mattered to him.

‘Never mind, sweetheart,’ he said tenderly : ‘don’t cry. It’ll be all right. And now we shan’t have to part after all, you see. You can stay and take care of me always.’

Viola clung to him sobbing. ‘But I’m not fit to. I was such a little beast to you when I was here before.’

‘Never mind, darling : that doesn’t matter now. You’ll never be a little beast, as you call it, to me again, so let us forget all about it, and be happy.’

‘I don’t see how you can forgive me,’ sobbed Viola.

‘Don’t bother about that,’ said Hugh simply : ‘I love you.’

‘Well, as long as I live I shall never forgive myself—never—never !’

‘Oh ! yes you will : because you and I have been such friends, Babs ; and I can never be friends with anybody who can’t forgive my wife.’ By this time Kinfell had pulled himself together, and the tangle had begun to unravel itself before his eyes. He still could not imagine how he had failed to recognise his wife at once. But the fact remained that he had failed, and thereby hangs this tale. And perhaps his failure was not so strange after all : for the Viola whom he had failed to recognise was a Viola who had lost her beauty and had consequently found her soul : a stupendous change indeed !

‘Now be a good girl and leave off crying and tell me all about it,’ Hugh said, leading his new-found wife to a large sofa and sitting down beside her : and together they pieced together this strange story and filled up the blanks. As they talked, it gradually became clear to them that it was really Barbara who had been killed

in the railway accident: but as her remains were burned beyond recognition—and as she was expected by that train—her aunt naturally concluded that the tall, copper-haired girl, who had been rescued from the burning carriage containing Barbara's bag and rugs, was Barbara herself. There was nothing whereby to identify Viola at all—she herself had taken good care of that—so that no doubt as to the supposed Barbara's identity had ever crossed anybody's mind; and her total loss of memory clinched the affair. It was all so simple, and at the same time so utterly amazing.

'You see, Hughie, old Culpepper was right after all. As soon as I got back into my former surroundings my memory came back to me. But how were we to know that these surroundings were not in New Zealand at all, but in Kent?'

'We couldn't know, worse luck!'

'And in a way we were right; for the old horrid, selfish heartless Viola *was* killed in the railway accident,' said Viola, nestling up still closer to her husband: 'and a plainer—and I trust a nicer—woman has risen like a Phoenix from her ashes. I will be a better wife to you, Hughie, than I was before: but oh! I wish I hadn't lost my beauty!'

'Bother your beauty!' replied Kinfehl, kissing her fondly. 'You will always be the most beautiful woman in the world to me.'

'And it did make me horrid and vain and selfish, though I loved it,' continued Viola: 'I dare say if I'd never lost it I should have gone on being horrid and vain and selfish for ever and ever. I suppose the principle of the right hand and the right eye applies equally to the face, if the face is too good-looking: and it is certainly better to enter life maimed as I am now, than to live on without my ever knowing what Love is like.'

‘ You ’re not maimed—stuff and nonsense ! ’ murmured KinfeU fondly.

‘ Still, darling, it is better to look things in the face, even if the face isn’t what it used to be : and I really don’t mind anything now that I ’ve got you, and know that we needn’t say good-bye to each other ever.’ And she lifted the face that wasn’t what it used to be, and kissed her husband passionately.

‘ My darling, my own darling ! ’ whispered KinfeU in an ecstasy of happiness. To his simple soul the former misery was as waters that had passed away : all he knew and all that he cared for was that the woman whom he adored was his at last.

‘ It is very confusing being two people at once,’ remarked his wife : ‘ very confusing indeed ! And especially when I remember how I have hated and despised Viola KinfeU, and longed for her to be punished as she deserved. And now she never will be. I really am quite sorry for that ! I feel like King David did when he said the ewe-lamb man must surely die, and Nathan replied “ Thou art the man.” It is dreadful to know that that loathsome Viola is really me.’

Her husband silenced her further self-condemnation with his kisses.

‘ All the same, sweetheart,’ he continued after a moment’s blissful pause, his thoughts reverting to the railway accident, ‘ I wonder they didn’t see you were a married woman by your wedding-ring. By the way,’ he added with a sudden start, moving a little away from his wife and looking at her unadorned left hand, ‘ where is your wedding-ring ? What on earth has become of it ? ’

Viola sprang to her feet. ‘ My wedding-ring, of course ! How stupid of me ! I ’d forgotten all about that. Come with me, Hughie, and I ’ll find it for you. I was such a little ass in my good-looking days

that I wanted to get rid of it : and now the right to wear it is the only thing that matters to me in the whole world.'

Quickly she passed down the long room, and then through numerous other rooms and passages till she reached the great staircase, with her husband close on her heels. She knew her way through the rambling old house as no stranger could have done, and with an accuracy which showed that her lost memory was fully restored. Straight as an arrow from a bow she went to the room which used to be hers, but which had never been used since her reckless flight all those long years ago ; and, crossing to the huge carved fireplace, she touched the hidden spring and revealed the secret hiding-place.

'By Jove!' exclaimed Kinfell : 'I never knew of this all the years I've lived here.'

She put her hand into the secret cupboard and drew out the plain gold circlet once regarded by her as the badge of her slavery, but now as the sacred symbol of the sacrament of her marriage. 'Here it is!' she exclaimed. 'Just where I hid it all those years ago, when I ran away from my darling Hughie.'

'Yes, it's your wedding-ring, sure enough,' said Kinfell as they examined it together : 'look, sweetheart, here our names are, and the date of our marriage, engraved inside.'

'And to think of its lying here all these years doing nothing ! And when you and I should have been so thankful for its services.'

'It has lain fallow too long,' said Kinfell : 'much too long ! It must be put into working order again at once.' And he took the ring from her.

'You must put it on, Hughie,' she whispered as she relinquished it, 'as you did before : but this time you must put it on firmer so that it will stick, and never, never come off again as long as we both shall live.'

Hugh raised the ring to his lips and kissed it : then he slipped it on to the third finger of his wife's left hand, using as he did so the ancient form of words : ' With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow : in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

THE END

FICTION

THE IVORY TRAIL. By TALBOT MUNDY, author of 'King of the Khyber Rifles,' etc.

This tale describes how a chance encounter at Zanzibar leads four Englishmen to set forth in quest of old Tippoo Tib's fabulous hoard of buried ivory. All they have to do is to search a tract of country something more than a thousand miles square, with the English and German Governments as their competitors, and half the criminals in Africa at their heels : and the story of their experiences affords ample measure of thrilling adventures and escapes and hair-raising exploits.

THE NORTH DOOR. By GREVILLE MACDONALD, author of 'How Jonas found his Enemy,' etc.

This is a novel of exceptional quality. The scene is laid in eighteenth-century England, and the writer's profound and intimate knowledge of the period, his imaginative force, and the charm and whimsicality of his style lift the story high above the ruck of fiction. It tells of the love of a parson, who is a social reformer and champion of child-rights, for a noble lady unfortunately married : and at the same time it is a vivid and exciting story of action.

THE CALL OF THE OFFSHORE WIND. By RALPH D. PAINE, author of 'The Fighting Fleets.'

This breezy and exciting story relates the career of a young sea captain, the son of a Maine shipbuilder, whose shipyard has fallen into evil days owing to the gradual abandonment of the wooden ship. The hero therefore follows the sea, and has many adventures, including both mutiny and shipwreck ; while on shore he has some interesting experiences both in love and business. The author has an intimate knowledge of life on the sea, and his book will be appreciated by all who enjoy a wholesome, stirring story of love and adventure.

SALT. By CHARLES G. NORRIS.

This fine and powerful story gives a vital picture of an American boy in school, college, business, and marriage. It is a story of real human life, with its pains and joys, its mistakes, its defeats and victories. The characters are real flesh and blood, and the style and treatment are direct and forceful.

STAFF TALES. By Captain W. P. LIPSCOMB. Illustrations by H. M. BATEMAN.

These shrewd and witty sketches of the lighter side of life in the British Army are full of the fun that appeals to the civilian as well as the military, and to the old as well as the young, and that is obviously not without its background of fact and experience. Mr. H. M. Bateman's delightful illustrations furnish an additional attraction.

FICTION

MARE NOSTRUM. By V. IBANEZ, author of 'The Four Horsemen.'

'Mare Nostrum' surpasses even 'The Four Horsemen' in the power and intensity of its dramatic appeal and in the wealth and vividness of its descriptions of people and places. While the German submarine warfare has suggested the writing of the story, it is not in the ordinary sense a war novel, only a small number of its pages being actually concerned with the European conflict. Mare Nostrum is the Mediterranean and the principal character is the captain of a neutral—Spanish—vessel. Apart from its narrative appeal the descriptions of life on the Mediterranean are of absorbing interest.

HEART'S HAVEN. By CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM, author of 'Jewel,' etc.

May Caline, the one-time village beauty of Leacock, who is the central figure in Mrs. Burnham's new story, is a widow, and at middle age when the story opens; but in spite of many hardships and troubles she has retained the spirit and zest as well as the charm of a girl, and the healing influence of her gracious personality disperses other people's troubles as well as her own. There are two love-stories in the book, which will be appreciated not only for its narrative interest, but for its shrewd observation and its comforting philosophy of life.

RAINBOW VALLEY. By L. M. MONTGOMERY, author of 'Anne's House of Dreams,' etc.

Miss Montgomery's new book is a story that both old and young will enjoy. The pranks and adventures of the minister's family and the sensation which these high-spirited but lovable children cause among their neighbours are described with abundance of fun as well as pathos; and they form the background to two love-stories, one of which leaves the minister happily married to a charming wife who restores comfort and order to his neglected home. 'Anne' and her family play their part in the story, and readers of the 'Anne' stories will welcome several other old friends.

THE BRANDING IRON.

By KATHERINE NEWLIN BURT.

This remarkably powerful and vivid story grips one's interest from the first page to the last. The character of the heroine, who from a life of ignorance and hardship in a Western State finds her way to New York and there wins fame and fortune on the stage, dominates the story by its mingled strength and simplicity. As a first novel the book is a striking achievement.

THE LAIRD OF GLENFERNIE.

By MARY JOHNSTON, author of 'Lewis Rand,' 'The Wanderers.'

Set, as it is, in a romantic period of English history, this book should rival in popularity 'Sir Mortimer,' 'The Old Dominion,' and 'Lewis Rand.'

